



RALPH L. CORRIGAN

ANSWERING THE CALL

*The Story of Community Service
and Volunteerism at Sacred Heart University*

ANSWERING THE CALL

"Thousands of students and faculty and staff have been involved in some form of community service – Habitat for Humanity, the Merton House Soup Kitchen, tutoring at one of the local schools, visiting old age homes. You name it, we have students and faculty who have done it. There is a genuine concern for the poor."

– Anthony J. Cernera
President, Sacred Heart University



"This book is really fascinating, beautifully written, and assimilates a tremendous amount of material into a dramatic and engaging 'story' that tells something very important about what the school is about. It should be read by all members of the Sacred Heart Community."

– Sid Gottlieb
Professor, Sacred Heart University

"This book tells the story of a journey of the heart, transformed by walking with the poor of El Salvador and Bridgeport – people who teach us about the meaning of hope, faith, and love."

– Eilene Bertsch
Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs
Sacred Heart University



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Ralph L. Corrigan

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Foreword

In Dr. Corrigan's moving account of Sacred Heart University's growing engagement with the world, you will read dozens of stories of selfless involvement by members of our community.

Some come here with a home-grown appreciation of the value of helping others, of growing into their best selves by reaching out to those in need. For others, it is more obviously a journey they wouldn't dare to have dreamed of when first they arrived at Sacred Heart University.

Thousands of our students, faculty, and staff have participated in community service. Why do we do it? Because, as a Catholic university, answering the call of the prophets and the Gospel to feed and clothe the needy, to visit those in prisons, to build bridges of justice and peace, flows from the heart of our deepest tradition. We do it, in the final analysis, because it's who we are, and it's who we want to be. It is a defining element of what it means to be human.

Sacred Heart University is motivated by a recognition of the dignity and worth of every human being as a daughter or son of God, a creature of inestimable value. Our Mission Statement puts it bluntly. Our University, it declares, "has a responsibility to share its resources and its special gifts and talents for the betterment of the human community. All members of the University community are encouraged to participate in the wider community through service to others, especially the poor."

In our years of community service many of us have learned a very important lesson. The lesson is this: Where there is love, there is life, and where there is life, there is joy and hope. When we extend ourselves in love toward another, in concern and compassion, we find our very selves. Love invites us to open our minds and our hearts, to be transformed and renewed.

Some years ago, Mother Teresa addressed a group of graduates with these thoughts: "I pray that those young people do not carry just a piece of paper with them but that they carry with them love, peace, and joy. That they become the sunshine of God's love to our people, the hope of eternal happiness and the burning flame of love wherever they go. That they become the carriers of God's love, that they be able to give what they have received. For they have received not to keep but to share."

Sacred Heart University has been richly blessed over these decades, and *Answering the Call* shows you some of the important reasons. Students and staff alike recognize engagement in the world as part of their ongoing educations. Just as they did not begin the process of learning when they entered this special community, so we hope they will not imagine that it ends when they take their leave of us. In the same way, the vocation of building up the City of God on this good earth belongs to all of us, all our days.

Anthony J. Cernera
President, Sacred Heart University

Preface

On a breezy, sunny afternoon in late April of 2001, people stood four and five deep in a semi-circle around the front steps of the St. Charles Urban Center on East Main Street in Bridgeport. The crowd—including representatives from St. Charles Parish, the Inner-City Foundation, the Diocese of Bridgeport, the Bridgeport Community Health Center, and administrators and health professionals from Sacred Heart University—was assembled for the ribbon-cutting and blessing ceremony for the Sacred Heart University/St. Charles Church Health and Wellness Center, a facility dedicated to providing expert health care for parishioners and residents of Bridgeport.

At the ceremony, to place the moment in perspective, Dr. Anthony J. Cernera, president of the University, spoke about how more than a decade earlier, with the assassination of the Jesuits at the University of Central America in 1989, Sacred Heart University had pledged its assistance to El Salvador, to help in any way it could to support the growing worldwide appeal to end that country's bloody civil war. Soon after the Jesuits were slain, said Dr. Cernera, to underscore the University's solidarity with the people of El Salvador in their struggle to obtain social justice, and to show support for the voice of the Church in that region at that time, Sacred Heart University bestowed an honorary doctorate on the Archbishop of El Salvador, Arturo Rivera Damas. Next, the President explained, the University decided to further support the fledgling peace process in that country by sending faculty and administrative delegates to El Salvador. Then Dr. Cernera made the connection between the new Health Center and El Salvador by saying, "My friend Father Brackley, a Jesuit who worked in the South Bronx and who took up the cause of the slain Jesuit rectors said to us when we visited the University

of Central America, 'You don't have to travel all the way to El Salvador to help the poor and oppressed. You can do that right in Bridgeport.'" And that, the President said, is why we are here and why the Health and Wellness Center is today a reality.

Among the several representatives from the University for the Center's ribbon-cutting ceremonies stood five people who had traveled with the various delegations to El Salvador since the trips had started in the summer of 1992, each in her or his own way transformed by the Salvadoran experience, and returned to our campus determined to work on behalf of the poor in the inner-city. For those people, the Wellness Center represented a tangible outgrowth of their Salvadoran experience. That afternoon, several speakers at the ceremony lauded the efforts of those responsible for making the Wellness Center a reality, but the few words spoken by Sally Fernandez from the Parish Life Commission cut to the heart of the matter. "People come down here and say they are going to do something," she said. "Sacred Heart did it!"

Fernandez, in a real sense, gave voice to a distinctive feature of Sacred Heart University: its insistence, from its beginnings, on volunteerism and community service as an integral part of its educational mission. From the earliest days of the school, when the spirit of Vatican II and its mandate on the preferential treatment for the poor infused the thinking of the school's founders and the actions of the University community, to the current reality of service being fully institutionalized at the school, Sacred Heart University has projected an unwavering resolve to act as an agent for social change and social justice, particularly as those ideals apply to its neighbors, the forgotten poor of the Park City.

What follows is an attempt to capture in words and pictures the Sacred Heart University story of service and volunteerism, a story filled with heart-rending and heart-warming anecdotes, and the sweat and tears of countless members of the University community. Inevitably, because service so permeated the fabric of the school, some of what was accomplished will go unnoticed in the pages that follow, shrouded in the collective memories of the past. For every story told, others remain untold. Whether your story appears here or not, this book is dedicated to all who acted out the service mission of the University.

Much thanks must go to Dr. Cernera for giving me the opportunity to work on this project, to Dr. Thomas Forget and Dr. Claire Paolini for helping me develop an outline of the chapters, and to Dr. David Curtis, whose advice on retirement gave me the space and time to write this book. Special thanks must go to my good friends Sr. Donna Dodge, Eilene Bertsch, and Phyllis Machledt, who generously put up with my constant pestering as the chapters progressed, and who from the beginning helped define, shape, and later critique this endeavor. Also, I want to thank Don Harrison from Public Relations for proofreading the manuscript, Eileen Paoletta for her gracious help running off multiple drafts of the chapters, Roberta Reynolds for her work on the photo section, and my long-time friend Joe Myers, of the Modern Languages and Classics Department at Siena College, for his assistance with the Spanish in the text. Lastly, a special note of gratitude must go to my colleague and mentor Sid Gottlieb for his patience, valuable advice, and expert editorial assistance.

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24. Muioz, "Fighting the Enduring Earthquake," 2.
25. Terry Neu, personal interview, 28 February 2001.
26. Muioz, "Fighting the Enduring Earthquake," 2
27. Neu, personal interview.
28. McAllister, "El Salvador Journal."
29. Neu, personal interview.
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33. Sr. Elena Jaramillo. Unedited video by César Muioz, Tierra Blanca, El Salvador, 11 February 2001.
34. McAllister, personal interview.
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44. Machledt, personal interview.
45. Machledt, personal interview.
46. Donna Dodge and Eilene Bertsch, personal interview, 13 March 2001.
47. Machledt, personal interview.
48. Anthony J. Cerna, "Welcome from the President," *Sacred Heart University Undergraduate Catalog* (2000-01), 2.
49. Anthony J. Cerna, class talk, 23 March 1999.

CHAPTER ONE

Early Years

The story of service and volunteerism at Sacred Heart University starts with the teachings of Jesus Christ in the gospels, teachings that permeated the thinking in the Catholic Church at the time of the Second Vatican Council, and that led to the Church's reaffirmation of the role of the laity, the renewed call for social action and social justice, and specifically the Church's pronouncements on the preferential treatment for the poor.

When the Most Reverend Walter W. Curtis, Bishop of Bridgeport, contemplated founding Sacred Heart University, he dreamed of an institution of higher learning infused with the spirit of Vatican II, graduating young men and women ready to assume an active role in the life of the Church. That dream became a reality and the school's first catalog clearly stipulated that "one of the major goals of the university should be preparation for a life of personal sanctity and for active participation in the Catholic apostolate."¹

Another defining characteristic of the new school on Park Avenue was its lay staff and administration. "It was Bishop Curtis who first suggested the establishment of its most innovative feature, a completely lay character," wrote Dr. John A. Rycenga, author of "Project Innovation," the institution's first self-study report. "The lay concept was hardly a new one, but with Vatican II about to begin, and with liberalizing trends apparent throughout American Catholicism, the time for its reintroduction was

propitious.”² How propitious was to be measured by the response of Catholic academicians who left posts at other colleges to join in the new experiment, arriving at Sacred Heart University filled with the rhetoric of the *Aggiornamento*, and charged with a sense of idealism and purpose. “There was a challenge,” recalled Doug Bohn, the current assistant vice-president of Academic Affairs and University registrar. “All of us came from backgrounds that were Catholic and probably from institutions that were run by religious orders. This was a lay experience.”³ John Croffy, who joined the staff in August of 1963 as the director of Student Personnel, said:

I’d like to reemphasize what I always believed the Sacred Heart story was, in relation to the laity. When I used to go out in the early days and into the Catholic high schools where there were priests and nuns present, I always used to explain the presence of Sacred Heart University to the students in the presence of these people as the new emergence of the laity in their faith. I think that Vatican II and Pope John pointed out, and history has shown, that the Church doesn’t belong just to priests and nuns. It’s not their responsibility alone. As a result of Vatican II, we were trying to educate Catholics at Sacred Heart along with other faiths, but particularly Catholics, to assume a responsible role.”⁴

Clearly, administrators and faculty signing on at the new university believed they were participating in a defining moment in the history of Catholicism and higher education. For most, coming to Sacred Heart University was an act of faith, an answering of the call of the Church to help celebrate the emerging role of the laity in the post-conciliar world.

An Early Emphasis on Social Action

The founding administrators—Dr. William H. Conley, the first president, and Dr. Maurice O’Sullivan, the vice-president—focused on building a quality curriculum and attracting qualified area students, but at the same time they stressed to incoming

students the importance of the core values of the Catholic intellectual tradition and particularly the spirit of Vatican II, with its emphasis on social action and social justice.⁵ In his first address to the students, Conley called for "first, intellectual development; second, moral and spiritual development; and third, self-motivation to undertake a Christian apostolate."⁶

This was, after all, the 1960s, a time heady with social activism. Lisa von York, a student leader writing in the school paper, the *Obelisk*, called attention to the "gradual shifting and realignment of American moral values occurring mainly in the ranks of the country's young adult population." She spoke of students being "galvanized" into action, "going out and giving help where it is needed." Von York, the daughter of sociology professor Tania von York, noted that "tutoring projects in operation throughout this area are a testimony to a more concerned student mentality."⁷ And in his homily at the annual Mass of the Holy Spirit to start the 1967 school year, in recognition of the efforts of a new generation of social activists, Bishop Curtis said, "What a great privilege to be young in this post-conciliar age—to have the youthful zeal and openness to life." He praised youth's "heightened influence in society," and exhorted the students to devote themselves to a life of service. "In the prospect of peace," he said, "those of you who are privileged to receive an education have a responsibility to serve mankind."⁸

The Bishop's words, "a responsibility to serve mankind," sounded familiar to the assembled students, because earlier that summer several had met to plan a tri-university student council specifically to address local urban problems. "Students at Sacred Heart University," the local press reported, "are developing a social action council designed to involve SHU students in Greater Bridgeport social service activities. The project follows a series of summer meetings with representatives of Fairfield University and the University of Bridgeport." The same article noted that "the SHU organization will include representatives from various social service societies and interested students from academic fields concerned with social problems." As to the purpose of the new organization, the article said, "The Tri-University organization has the dual purpose of enabling students at all three institutions to

become familiar with community needs, to encourage volunteer student participation in existing community social service programs, and to initiate new programs for university student participation."⁹

Fr. Martin McDermott, University Chaplain at the time, believed that the students' activism could be traced directly to Vatican II. "Father McDermott attributes much of the current student enthusiasm for social involvement within the community to the currents unleashed by the Second Vatican Council and related developments which have emphasized concern for the poor and underprivileged," reported an article in the *Bridgeport Sunday Post*. "He feels that much of this spirit has rubbed off locally and predicts greater SHU student involvement in the months to come." The same article noted the participation of an "estimated 400 SHU students in tutoring and Confraternity of Christian Doctrine work throughout the local area."¹⁰

The numbers of students volunteering in Bridgeport did not go unnoticed by the administration. An article in the school paper, "Brains and Service Recognized at SHU," stated, "The university recognized students with significant achievements toward the two-fold objectives of the university—academic excellence and community service—in ceremonies conducted before vacation in the auditorium." The Kreuzfahrer society was cited for work in an "inner city area with Action for Bridgeport Community Development (ABCD) program. O'Sullivan complimented the society and said that their work is truly a manifestation of the 'service-above-self' concept."¹¹

While Sacred Heart University students developed the Tri-University Social Action Council, the administration joined forces with the University of Bridgeport, Fairfield University, and Housatonic Community College, to form the Higher Education Center for Urban Studies (HECUS) to ensure institutional involvement in helping to solve problems in the Bridgeport community. "In the present troubled period when so much emphasis is being placed upon the problems of the urban community," said the four area college presidents in a joint statement, "it is most appropriate that the institutions of higher learning in the Greater Bridgeport region combine their resources to assist in finding the most effective solutions to the problems in this area of

urban studies." The major purposes for the consortium were: "to coordinate research efforts in the field of urban problems, opportunities and concerns in Southwestern Connecticut; to initiate, channel and expedite the efforts of the member institutions and their service to urban activities in the area; to provide a center through which student learning might be enriched by closer association with urban problems especially through utilizing the community as a laboratory resource; to relate the institutions of higher education to the needs of the community, not only through normal educational programs, but also through a program of continuing education including conferences, seminars and specialized courses"; and "to develop financial support for appropriate urban studies from governmental agencies, foundations and other interested sources."¹²

HECUS was placed in the capable hands of H. Parker Lansdale, director of the YMCA and an urban activist voted "Outstanding Citizen of the Year" by Bridgeport's Civitans. "Parker had a real missionary zeal and a tremendous number of contacts in the community," recalled William B. Kennedy, a former member of the History Department and assistant to the president at the University. "His concept was to expand the level of educational opportunities to the people," said Kennedy, who added that the Center "certainly made the community much more aware of the higher education resources in the area."¹³ While the main thrust of the program, said Croffy, "was to help minorities get into higher education,"¹⁴ an added benefit provided by the consortium was a forum for administrators "to get together to talk," recalled Doug Bohn. "Registrars met with registrars, deans met with deans, and discussed items of mutual interest. Essentially Parker was trying to build a cooperative effort among the schools."¹⁵ The consortium lasted several years, noted Kennedy, with Lansdale "its heart and soul." Kennedy added, "When he left it dissolved."¹⁶

A Focus on the Poor

Even though the times gave rise to social activism on campus, the University's insistence on community service was, in part, inspired by the vision of Conley. In a talk to area civic

representatives and newspaper editors, Conley called the school “a product of the thought of the Second Vatican Council,” and spoke of the University’s “commitment to the gospel of social betterment through student community service.” At the same time, Conley promised that the University would “expand its efforts to encourage student participation in activities designed to uplift and advance progress in deprived urban neighborhoods.”¹⁷ Reporting on the same talk, the *Obelisk* quoted the first president as saying “Schools are best qualified to develop students capable and conscious of community service obligations and who recognize such community service as their personal responsibility.”¹⁸

On campus, social activism and volunteerism soon became synonymous with the University’s mission. “When fraternities and sororities were approved,” recalled Bohn, “they could not be approved simply as social organizations. They all had to show the group providing some kind of service to the community.”¹⁹ In a history of the school written in 1988 to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of its founding, Professors Charles Eby and Paul Siff called special attention to the on-going spirit of activism on campus when they wrote: “A number of students recognized a duty to consider and respond to issues beyond their immediate, everyday interests, and the social concerns of the 1960s were manifest at the University.”²⁰ This author tried to capture some of the fervor for community service in the introduction to a University catalog in the early 1970s:

It seems everyone is talking about commitment today. But at Sacred Heart we think we live it. You see, our students make a decision . . . they decide not to go away to school, but to stay in their own community where they can put their idealism to the test . . . Because they know that’s where the action is—in their own community . . . Like Armando, who teaches English to a class of Portuguese immigrants . . . or like Sidnee, who spends her spare time helping out in a local drug referral center . . . or like the kids who work as tutors for inner-city children . . . Yes, that’s the flavor of social consciousness, the meaning of commitment at Sacred Heart.²¹

The local press reported, "In Bridgeport and surrounding areas, there's hardly a community fund raising event that hasn't found SHU fraternity brothers and sorority sisters out collecting."²²

In fact, the list of service sites and organizations benefiting from these early volunteer efforts reads like a "Who's Who" of community activism. A sampling of the efforts included: United Way, Tuberculosis Foundation, Leukemia Drive, Barbara Ann Fund, Cancer Fund, March of Dimes, Expo, parties for mentally retarded children, Muscular Dystrophy Association Fund Raiser, Halloween Party and Easter Egg Hunt for underprivileged children in Bridgeport, American Red Cross Blood Bank, Multiple Sclerosis Society, sponsoring a foster child, working at the Bridgeport Regional Center, letters and visits to prisoners, visits to mentally ill at Fairfield Hills, collecting a truck load of food, clothing, and supplies for Honduras flood victims, and visiting the Dinan Center.²³

So, from the beginnings of the school, the spirit of community service thrived at Sacred Heart University, was viewed as integral to the school's mission, and included the efforts of a sizable portion of the student body. Moreover, besides volunteer work, several disciplines involved students in field work experiences, foreshadowing the current interest in service-learning which requires community service for courses. Dr. Elizabeth Kelly, professor of psychology, for example, talked about a special course sequence that enabled "students to test the theoretical classroom material they have been exposed to in actual clinical working situations."²⁴

But aside from the volunteer efforts and field work experiences of the students, a few endeavors that began at Sacred Heart went well beyond the usual definition of "service" and deserve separate mention.

Founding the Thomas Merton House

Part of the service commitment of the school was lived by the faith community at Sacred Heart University when its members established the Thomas Merton House of Hospitality, an effort to put into practice the spirit of the Gospels, and particularly the

Church's mandate for the preferential treatment for the poor. The poor, in this case, were the hungry and homeless of Bridgeport. There was a felt need on the part of the founders of the Merton House to do something concrete, to stop talking about the plight of the poor and to actually administer to their needs. The story about the beginnings of the Merton House was told by Jack Hickey-Williams from the diocesan Ministry of Social Concerns:

The early 70s was a fruitful period in the renewal of the church's commitment to her social mission. The Spirit's creation of gospel and ecumenical council gave birth to the movements that linked spirituality with service. One of the most frequently repeated quotations of the time was "The Church cannot preach justice to the world unless she is first just in the eyes of the world." How best to respond to this dilemma? Groups of worshipping Christians in many different Catholic settings were repeating this question. There was in a sense a quest to serve in such a way that worship was indeed true worship such as Isaiah had first described. In this larger context, the community that gathered at Sacred Heart University on Saturday evenings sought some help.²⁵

Fr. John Giuliani, chaplain at the University at the time, recalled the spirit of the founding as follows:

The specifics of founding Merton House happened in the SHU Chapel on a Saturday night during liturgy.

Kathy Thorsby, then visiting from the Community of Non-Violence in D.C. (Kathy was originally from Westport), spoke of their opening day of Zaccheus House—a soup kitchen in D.C. when Mother Teresa visited and, contrary to her own rules, sat and had a bowl of soup.

After Kathy spoke, I asked her, "What can we do to help?" She answered directly: "Open a soup kitchen in Bridgeport."

This was in the spring. It didn't take long to open the Merton House. Our love of Merton has inspired us for years."²⁶

The flyer celebrating the Center's twenty-fifth anniversary relates the rest of the story:

In the winter of 1973, Ed Kirchner, Bill Dorfer, Sister Kathleen Deignan, and Father John Giuliani made a retreat at the Weston Priory in Vermont to pray and discern about the possibility of opening a soup kitchen in Bridgeport. The fruit of that retreat was to go ahead with plans to open a house of hospitality. A building was found on One Housatonic Avenue.

After getting full support and backing from the group at Sacred Heart University, renovations were begun on the building. The name Thomas Merton was chosen because he had had a very profound impact on the lives of all those who had made the retreat in Weston. Thomas Merton truly exemplified all that a house of hospitality stood for, both by his writings and his personal example concerning such issues as peace and social justice.²⁷

On November 17, 1974, the Thomas Merton House of Hospitality officially opened its doors.

The first day was "pure mission," recalled Giuliani. "Eight of us broke up in pairs as directed in the Gospel. We headed North, South, East, and West of Merton House. We approached 'street' people and told them about where they could eat a hot meal with no strings attached. Our first meals were canned soup and bread."

Ending his reminiscence, Giuliani said, "It happened in Liturgy where the gifts of the Spirit are given. Everything flowed from there, in Gospel spirit."²⁸ So the Thomas Merton Center became a reality. In his historical overview of the beginnings of the Merton House, and in particular about the Weston retreat, Hickey-Williams wrote, "The fruit of that retreat was to be a very new type of ministry. Plans for a house of hospitality in the Catholic Worker tradition but with the support of a diocesan university (Sacred Heart University) and diocesan ministry continued."²⁹

Today, the Merton Center, which moved into the former St. Joseph's Church at 43 Madison Avenue in 1989 to accommodate

its expanding programs and services, is an integral part of Catholic Charities of Fairfield County, where 250 guests are fed and assisted daily. Its current mission statement reads: "The Thomas Merton Center is committed to providing a loving, safe, and hope-filled community which responds to the needs of its guests, and respects the dignity of each person. We reflect to the individual and the community our shared responsibility to love and support one another."³⁰ Besides the soup kitchen, the Center maintains an After-School Program, as well as a Family Support Center for young mothers and their children, a medical clinic, mental health services, prayer groups, Narcotic Anonymous, and literacy volunteers. At a recent fund-raising breakfast, Bishop Edward Egan, the newly appointed Archbishop of the Diocese of New York, said in praise of the work of the Merton Center, "I say to myself, Lord, maybe I could be that good, that generous, that giving. Everyone that comes to Merton House is treated as an honored guest, a child of God, an image of the Divinity. And that is a lesson for all of the Greater Bridgeport community, and it is a lesson for all of us. . . . I want to thank anyone who has any part in the Thomas Merton Center, for the wonderful good you do for the people who are hurting in our community, and for the great inspiration you give to us."³¹

Over the years, as the Merton Center grew to its present size and scope, the University made its presence felt with staff and students volunteering year around. Maryann Furlong, current director of the Center, noted this ongoing support when she said, "groups of students come to help at the Family Support Center, the soup kitchen, with the after-school program. Sacred Heart people have been coming here for as long as I've been here." Then Furlong added, "I think the Merton Center is a perfect example of what happens when the laity really understands and believes in their power to effect change, that it doesn't have to come from the hierarchy. Father John Giuliani was involved but I'm sure he was on an equal footing with this small group of lay people who just got together and prayed, and they said 'All right, we are praying, but there's got to be another step.' And one thing led to another—prayer in action. I think it's continued since Vatican II. Lay people are alive and well."³²

A flyer explains the Center's focus: "For the first ten years, our main focus was feeding. However, the changing face of those in need has caused us to dramatically expand our mission to include programs to help people move out of the grinding cycle of poverty. Today, we are committed to helping our guests become more self-sufficient, and we currently have several programs that enable and encourage them to take their lives in a positive direction."³³

The Appalachia Connection

Another early University commitment to service took the form of an annual clothing, toys, and food drive, culminating in truckloads of goods driven down to Appalachia by students. As early as 1966, Appalachia's plight took on a special meaning for the campus. "We spent our week working for the local branch of the Office of Economic Opportunity," said Jan Muldoon of her experiences in Dickenson County, Virginia. "Our task was to assist two Community Aides by going about the country side urging people to register the following week. . . . It seemed as though the county, tucked away in the mountains, had been forgotten by the twentieth century."³⁴

A couple of years later "a group of concerned juniors and seniors who wished to see more social action" at the University, founded Sigma Tau Omega. "We began a food, clothing, and toy drive which was to benefit the people of Appalachia," said fraternity members. The *Prologue* called the project "a huge success," and the fraternity "decided to sponsor the drive every year."³⁵ The *Bridgeport Sunday Post* reported:

The fourth annual Appalachia drive is underway at Sacred Heart University. The drive, which will bring four truckloads of clothing, canned foods, toys, small household items, and baby furniture to Vansburg, Ky., is coordinated by Sigma Tau Omega fraternity at SHU. . . . Dean of students John A. Croffy affirmed the value of the Appalachia drive as an effort to help students broaden their community interests.

The drive's chairman expects to collect more than 20,000 pounds of materials for Vansburg, transporting them in four trucks donated by local branches at car rental agencies. . . . A small group of fraternity brothers and interested students will drive the 600 miles to Vansburg on Dec. 22. The goods will be distributed the following day, and the SHU students plan to return home by Christmas eve.³⁶

By 1975, "over 100,000 pounds of toys and clothing" had been distributed in Appalachia.³⁷ Before Christmas each year, boxes of donations piled up in the school's corridors, were loaded into rental trucks, driven down to Appalachia, and distributed to the needy.

The REPHAS Project

Besides founding the Merton Center and supporting the annual Appalachia drive, another social action project initiated at the University around the same time was a program for physically handicapped children. In 1973, Jack Farina, a psychology major, started a program called REPHAS (Recreation for the Physically Handicapped After School), which included the efforts of several outside agencies, students receiving three credits for field-work experience in psychology, and the members of several sororities and fraternities. Dr. Donald Brodeur, chair of the department at that time, recalled:

Jack Farina had been working during high school and his early college years at a summer camp for disabled kids upstate in Connecticut. When he came to Sacred Heart he realized through his contacts with the disabled community that there was nothing for the kids in this area. So he started on his own, working with kids after school, and he said, "Why can't I get some more students to help me?" He asked me about setting up a program for it, and I said, "Go ahead and try it." So he put together a program for handicapped kids after school and he called

it REPHAS. He got a bunch of students from the fraternities and sororities, but primarily focusing on psych majors, to help him. And eventually we incorporated that into a field experience program which became a required three-credit course for our students. Jack's REPHAS program was really the beginning of that.³⁸

"The goal of the program," noted an article in the 1977 edition of the school yearbook, was "to give these children the opportunity to get involved in activities that are not normally available to them. Mr. Farina's reasoning behind the program was that 'like most children, their parents don't have enough time to play with them in outside sports during the week.' Moreover, their confinement to wheelchairs or dependency on crutches further lessens their opportunity to play outside with the neighborhood children." The *Prologue* article pointed out that Farina "was able to devise the program through the cooperation of the Easter Seal Rehabilitation Center, the Bridgeport school system, Sacred Heart University and the Busch Bus Company. The Woman's Auxiliary of the Easter Seal Rehabilitation Center has continued to finance the program." Many of the REPHAS activities, concluded the article, "could not have materialized" had it not been for the cooperation of "sororities and fraternities on Sacred Heart's campus."³⁹

Over the years, Brodeur said, Farina's program "expanded to the point where we now run five or six sections of field experience every year during the summers—up to a hundred and fifty students, and sixty hours a semester in all kinds of agencies, working with handicapped kids, working with mentally retarded children and adults, working in halfway houses for recovering addicts. It has turned out to be a very successful program in a number of ways."⁴⁰

The Melady Years

As the University moved into and through the 1980s under the energetic leadership of Dr. Thomas Melady, a former U.S. ambassador to Uganda and Burundi who would later serve as

ambassador to the Vatican under the first Bush administration, the school's commitment to community service continued unabated. In 1983, to celebrate its twentieth anniversary, the University commemorated "two decades of service to Southwestern Connecticut by honoring twenty leaders in a community service awards ceremony," reported the *Bridgeport Sunday Post*. According to Melady, the honorees "marked by achievement in education, industry, civic and religious endeavors," exhibited "a commitment to the community" that exemplified "the meaning of the University."⁴¹

Similarly Melady praised the students' volunteer efforts "to build a better world." He wrote, "At least with the young men and women I meet on a daily basis, I see a group of people volunteering their energies and expertise in participatory government and social action. We have numerous examples of young people giving their time and energy to community projects."⁴² In another place, Melady spoke of the role of educators to "lead our students to a better understanding of how to conduct themselves." He went on to say, "We can tell students that the good life evolves from a series of worthwhile endeavors, and that selflessness and a willingness to perform services for fellow human beings is more important" than amassing material wealth.⁴³

In the journal *Catholicism in Crisis*, Melady wrote:

The time is right for the development of community-supported self-help programs to lift the poor out of poverty, enhance their sense of pride and dignity, and provide a solid material and spiritual base for the next generation. In particular, the challenges of changing technology require mechanisms for training the pre-school urban minority and other disadvantaged because social policy ought to aim at *empowering* the poor to become self-reliant and self-sustaining.⁴⁴

Focus on Educational Programs

In the mid-1980s, the University's Education Department began an intensive six-week summer remedial and enrichment program called Bridge, for low income and minority high school

students in Bridgeport, "to encourage high school students to go to college."⁴⁵ Dr. Alfred Tufano, chair of the department at the time, said that responding to community need was in the tradition of Sacred Heart University, and the superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Bridgeport, Bernard Helfrich, had nothing but praise for the program. "Bridge appears to give students the opportunity to straighten out any kinks in their preparation," he said, calling the program "a super, a great idea."⁴⁶ Besides the classroom and individualized instruction, education majors tutored the high school students in bi-monthly follow-up sessions.

A few years later, an alumnus began an educational enrichment program on campus for area minority students called the Saturday Hispanic Academy in Math and Science. Felipe Reinoso, honored by President William Clinton in a White House ceremony in Washington, D.C. with a "1999 President's Service Award,"⁴⁷ and currently the director of a successful charter school in Bridgeport called The Bridge Academy, started the Saturday Academy because of circumstances he encountered in Bridgeport schools. "I interviewed parents and discovered a dropout rate of 40%, and that was unacceptable," said Reinoso. "I thought it was important to expose kids to the college environment, to demystify college."⁴⁸ The Saturday Academy (assisted by Dr. María Teresa Torreira, professor of modern foreign languages, and Dr. Babu Geòrge, professor of chemistry), included tutoring, reading, and writing components to enhance regular classroom instruction, as well as motivational speakers from the Bridgeport area and field trips. "I rented a van—I paid for it myself and I was the driver—and picked them up at two locations in Bridgeport for the Saturday classes," said Reinoso. "To my surprise, all of them were there waiting. I knew then that education was something kids were looking for."⁴⁹

Another volunteer effort at an elementary school on Eckert Street around the corner from the University placed future teachers in classrooms. As part of the Adopt-a-School Program, students helped elementary school teachers at Bridgeport's John Winthrop School in teaching, class preparation and lesson planning, and working with special education and bilingual groups. "It's very exciting," said Stacy Filewicz, who worked with

emotionally or socially maladjusted students. "You feel like you are making a difference."⁵⁰ Before long, professors from disciplines other than education were accompanying Sacred Heart University students to Winthrop to help with activities, including students from an oral interpretation of literature course. "I wanted to make the students' experience real," said Dr. Marian Calabrese, professor of English. "We met twice a week. Once at SHU and once at Winthrop. I wanted the students to utilize their skills with real-life audiences. So we supplemented the curriculum with a read-aloud in a classroom at Winthrop."⁵¹ Currently, hundreds of students in education and service-learning courses volunteer at the school during the day and in an after-school program for latchkey children.

CHAPTER TWO

From Mission Statement to El Salvador

The long-standing commitment to the poor and the greater Bridgeport community took on new meaning in 1988 when Dr. Anthony J. Cernera was named the fifth president of Sacred Heart University. Dr. Cernera inherited a school with a rich tradition of community service, but a school facing troubling times with enrollments dropping and demographics pointing to a dwindling supply of high school graduates from Southwestern Connecticut, the area that traditionally sent students to the University. In fact, the University was at a crossroads. With a financial situation becoming more ominous by the day, and with a demoralized faculty and staff beginning to look elsewhere for more stable employment, the times were indeed propitious for new leadership and vision. Fortunately, the Board of Trustees selected a youthful visionary to lead the foundering University, luring him away from Marist College with the challenge to revive the ailing school, to reconnect the University to its original mission derived from the spirit of Vatican II, and finally to transform the school into one of the leading comprehensive Catholic universities in New England.

Arriving with a youthful enthusiasm (at thirty-eight he was the youngest president in the school's history), a scholarly background in systematic theology, and an abiding interest in the Catholic intellectual tradition, as well as a strong background in social activism as the Executive Director of the Bread for the

World Educational Fund, and armed with the enthusiastic support of the Bishop and the Board of Trustees, Cernera embraced his new position with all the zeal of a divine calling. "I believe that in the mystery of God's providence, inscrutable and beyond our full comprehension," he said in his inaugural address, "I have been called here to do a work that needs to be done, to make my contribution to the building of the human community, if you will, of God's Kingdom." In that same inaugural address, he drew attention to the special mission of the institution when he said, "love of learning, liberal education, and useful knowledge must be complemented by an environment that fosters service to others, especially the poor."¹

Immediately, the new president embarked on an ambitious and carefully planned initiative to place the school on a sound financial footing, to expand the applicant pool by building on-campus housing, and to continue attracting highly qualified faculty who shared his passion for the Catholic intellectual tradition. But beyond pressing demands to reinvigorate the financial status and enrollment, the new president recognized the need to move into the very psyche of the institution to create what he hoped would initiate a dramatic reconnection to the signs of the times in the Church and, as he noted in his inaugural address, to its teachings on the preferential treatment for the poor. One of the first steps was to draft a new mission statement that reflected the rich heritage of the institution, while embracing its hoped for future growth and direction. Then the new president faced the larger task of making that new direction outlined in the mission statement a deeply felt experience for faculty and staff—an experience so strong that it would ignite an institution-wide response to community service.

The Revised Mission Statement

As late as 1985, the *Academic Catalog* noted that the "institutional mission has remained unchanged since the University founding in 1963."² That meant that the notion of "service" as an educational objective at the school was present in the mission statement only in a general way. For example, the 1985

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version of the mission statement called for fostering "moral and spiritual growth in a Christian atmosphere conducive to the development of a stable character, and a sense of moral responsibility to self, community, and nation." Fostering a moral responsibility to community reflected the school's position on community service, especially as demonstrated by the social action of fraternities and sororities on campus, but the language failed to spell out what that responsibility was, leaving the statement vague and open to individual interpretation.

By 1987, under the presidency of Dr. Robert Preston, the mission statement in the *Academic Catalog* was amended to include the following: "It is rooted in the Catholic tradition as reflects the ecumenical thrust of post-Vatican II. Sacred Heart University challenges its students to open their eyes, ears, mind, and heart to new thoughts, knowledge, the environment, and the evolving world."³ While the words "the ecumenical thrust of post-Vatican II" realigned the mission statement more directly with the intentions of the school's founders and the campus-wide response to community service, the statement still lacked the post-conciliar element needed to direct the institution in the future—specifically a directive about the preferential treatment for the poor.

Recognizing that "the University would have to review and further develop its mission without relinquishing its original spirit,"⁴ Cernera drafted a revised mission statement which he then distributed throughout the campus for refinement and feedback. The resulting document, cited in the 1989 catalog, challenged the University "to assist in the development of people, knowledgeable of self, rooted in faith, educated in mind, compassionate in heart, responsive to social and civic responsibilities, and able to respond to an ever-changing world." And more specifically, on the issue of service, the new draft declared the University's "responsibility to share its resources and its special gifts and talents for the betterment of the human condition. All members of the University community are encouraged strongly to participate in the wider community through service to others, especially the poor."⁵ The words "all members of the University community are encouraged strongly to participate in the wider community through service to others, especially the poor" struck a vibrant chord in

the school's psyche, reenergizing its mission of service by raising it to the level of an institutional priority. For the first time in an official pronouncement, service was transformed into a mandate for guiding institutional response.

"Obviously, the University's mission can't be reduced to service," said Sr. Donna Dodge, S.C., vice-president for Mission and Planning. "It's much broader. When you look at the structure of the University, our mission is to educate, and service is an element of that. We are not a social service agency." But then Dodge pointed to the centrality of service. "I don't know that we could be a Catholic institution without focusing on the poor," she said. "The gospel is the touchstone, and that certainly calls for a preferential option for the poor."⁶

One challenge, with the new mission statement in place, was to create a program of sustained service that was unique. "We do not ask our students to engage in service unless the faculty and staff do the same," said Dodge. Then, she added, "service is based on the needs of the community, not on what students or faculty feel like doing." Another distinguishing feature of service at the University, she said, is that "we believe in sustained efforts . . . commitments, as opposed to one-shot deals." And finally, she pointed out, "We provide opportunities for our students and faculty to reflect on the service experiences."⁷

But while seeking to create a unique service mission, there remained the issue of ownership. Who on campus, what office, was responsible to see that service initiatives were carried out? From the school's earliest days, service had been the responsibility of the entire University community, and it was crucial that the newly articulated mission of service to the poor be embraced with that same sense of total community proprietorship. Several years later, while looking back at how the University measured up to the ownership issues, Dodge reflected that "service is not housed in only one office. We do have an Office of Service-Learning and Volunteer Programs, but in addition, service opportunities are generated through the classroom, in campus ministry, by athletic teams, in student life, fraternities and sororities, clubs, student government."⁸

But articulating a mission statement is relatively easy; acting on it so as to weave it into the very fabric of the institution is

quite a different matter. "If we don't live up to our mission statement," said Fr. Michael McLernon, campus minister, "then what are we doing here? What justification do we have for being here?" Perhaps the school's response to the call for service is best measured by the words of President Cernera:

Thousands of students and faculty and staff have been involved in some form of community service—Habitat for Humanity, the Merton House Soup Kitchen, tutoring at one of the local schools, visiting old age homes. You name it, we have students and faculty who have done it. There is a genuine concern for the poor. We invite people to come and work here as members of the faculty and staff who want to espouse that mission statement and want to contribute to make it happen. And that is what we are saying to students. 'This is the kind of place that we are.' At a fundamental level, attending to the mission and purposes of the institution, and inviting us continually to make that vision real, to embody it, is what I think is the challenge.¹⁰

The story of how Sacred Heart University distinguishes itself by encouraging service is a complex story of faith, courage, and vision. The rest of the story, bringing the history of service and volunteerism into the twenty-first century, started with the revision of the mission statement and with certain events in a war-torn, third world country in Central America known as the land of "The Saviour"—El Salvador.

The Road to El Salvador

After the revised mission statement was in place, a complex set of events sent several delegations of faculty and students traveling to a small country in Central America the size of the state of Massachusetts. First, there was the historical context of what was transpiring in El Salvador during its bloody civil war, and how the war was affecting the people of that country and faith communities all over the world, and more specifically how

that war affected our campus. Then, because of the revised mission statement, there was the need to develop a mindset at the University that understood, at least partially, what it meant to be poor. Who were the poor? What was it like for a community of people to live without the barest necessities on a daily basis? Was there a way for people on campus to come to know that reality—even minimally?

In the 1980s, the civil war that raged across the countryside in El Salvador was punctuated by several events that horrified the international community and created a groundswell of opposition to the war and the role the United States government played in supporting the right-wing political party and military in power. The public execution of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero on March 24, 1980, while he said Mass in the Chapel of the Divine Providence Cancer Hospital in San Salvador, shocked people around the world. Romero's assassination, an attempt to silence a voice that repeatedly called for peace and reconciliation among his people, was a brazen act of the Salvadoran power structure that would stop at nothing to maintain economic and military control over the country. But as Romero repeatedly said, "If they kill me, I will be resurrected in the Salvadoran people."¹¹ And that is exactly what occurred. The spirit of Romero, freed by the assassin's bullet, lives on in the people he served with such humility and grace. As Rubén Zamora, a candidate for the President of El Salvador in 1994 and a personal friend of Romero's, said, "His assassin and those behind the assassin could not liquidate his word and his presence among his people."¹² Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez, one of the founders of liberation theology in Latin America, said Romero "has flooded our hearts and minds with his presence; someone whose presence has reached the length and breadth of this continent and beyond. Someone who knew fully how to give up his life. Someone who was the pastor of this diocese, whose death and resurrection has converted him into a pastor of the universal Church."¹³

On campus, one response to Romero's assassination was to institute a lecture series in his honor. Dr. Joseph Grau, professor of religious studies, said several years later, "In April 1981, the Institute for Religion and Society here at Sacred Heart University

sponsored the first Oscar Romero Memorial Lecture. And why did we do so? Because we believe that what he had said and what he had done and what his life was in the three short years that he lived as Archbishop of San Salvador—that what he did then for the sake of the poor and the oppressed was of profound significance for all those who are concerned about what religion should be up to in a world that is devastated by poverty, oppression, and violence.” Professor Grau went on to say “across our world, social injustices in our country, in our state, in our cities, continue to dehumanize, oppress, and kill. And the number of victims is legion. The challenge to people of all religious beliefs to live their faith in action for justice I think faces every one of us.”¹⁴

One of the early Romero lectures occurred on March 9, 1983, when Carolyn Forché, the poet and journalist, read from her award-winning book, *The Country Between Us*, about “her personal experiences amid the revolutionary turmoil in El Salvador.” The press release from the University explained that “at the invitation of an El Salvadoran coffee farmer, she spent two years as a journalist and human rights investigator, witnessing brutal sights of human suffering and torture. She went because she ‘felt deeply that I was being presented with the means by which I could do something with my life.’”¹⁵

Still another response to the legacy of the slain Archbishop was a lecture on February 16, 1989, by the activist priest Fr. Daniel Berrigan, who talked of his indebtedness to Romero for making clear the “spirit of death” that permeated much of our world. Referring to the assassination of Romero and others, Berrigan said, “Sometimes this spirit of death according to need or occasion or even whim announces itself as passionate and stark. It fools not around. It cracks like a discharged bullet. Such is the story of Romero and countless other troublesome spirits across the world. They got in the way: that is their obituary. It mattered not at all that one victim was an honored and saintly archbishop and a hundred or thousands of others were nameless and poor. The contract went out, and the gun went off.”¹⁶

Then speaking directly to the assembled University community and guests who packed the Schine Auditorium, Berrigan leveled this charge:

The same spirit of death filters down and down toward us. Eventually we too breathe the spirit of death. It afflicts and stifles every area of decent striving. The same spirit that drives the great to death as a social method urges us, the "lowerarchy," toward such things as false peace, moral compromise, and complicity. This spirit of death reaching us stifles, mitigates, urges moral adjustment. Its slogans are "Things could be worse," it suggests "One does what one can," it urges "Silence is golden." The atmosphere afflicts us severally with dread, fear and trembling, floating anxiety, and moral numbing. We are thus normalized to conditions and events and crimes that are by any standard morally abnormal. We summon in response not rage and action but a feeble kind of half-dead whimper, cocktail chatter at the crimes of the high and mighty.¹⁷

But there is hope, Berrigan assured the audience, in the works of those who administer to the needs of the oppressed. In America, he said, there is a certain kind of heroism, "disconnected from macho images and conduct, a kind of tenderness that cares for others, an attentiveness to good work done modestly, caring for the down and out." Berrigan singled out the heroic acts of "men and women, confessors and teachers of faith, those who stand somewhere and pay up. . . . Such women and men are harboring persecuted aliens, praying at nuclear sites, telling the truth in courts, surviving long terms in jail." Then, in what amounted to a definition of service at Sacred Heart University, he talked of people who "serve the multitudes of poor and homeless, the victimized, the mental patients, the abandoned and expendable. Such cope with back-breaking needs that ever seem to multiply, never seem to be assuaged."¹⁸

By instituting the Oscar Romero Memorial Lecture Series, the Sacred Heart University community had responded intellectually to the atrocities that had become daily occurrences in El Salvador. But a more compelling question remained to be answered. With the revised mission statement in place, was there yet a larger role for the University to play in El Salvador? And if so, what would that role be? Looking ahead, it seems unlikely that what transpired—

the extent of University involvement in El Salvador—could possibly have been foreseen back in 1989. Then, nine months after Berrigan's talk at the University, another tragic event in the history of that war-torn country, shocked the world and moved the University to a new level of involvement with the people of El Salvador.

The Assassination of the Jesuits

Just after midnight on Thursday, November 16, 1989, while 300 members of the American forces-trained Atlacatl Battalion surrounded the campus of the University of Central America (UCA), approximately seventy members of the commando unit entered the grounds by forcing a gate, clambering up an embankment, and scaling a chain link fence. Their mission: to eliminate the outspoken rector of the University, the Jesuit Ignacio Ellacuría, and "to leave no witnesses." At the time, the superior of the Central American Province of the Society of Jesus, José María Tojeira, S.J., was living in San Salvador. "I had heard gunfire that night," he said, "but there had been shooting in the city all week between the army and the guerrillas, so I didn't think it was happening on the campus of the UCA." After being told about the murders, he said:

I went over immediately and saw the bodies of the Jesuits lying in front of their residence. . . . My first thought was, what should be done? I sent one Jesuit to speak with Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas, another to call all the Jesuits' communities in El Salvador to tell them to come to the site of the murders. Another I sent to notify the press, and then I myself called Rome and spoke with Father Alvaro Restrepo, the Jesuit assistant (coordinator) for northern Latin America. He was in shock when I told him and at first didn't believe me. Finally he said, "Who are the killers?" "The army, of course," I said, and I went on to talk about their brutality.¹⁹

As Fr. Dean Brackley, S.J., wrote: "The Salvadoran military had long claimed that the UCA was a hotbed of guerrilla activity

and perceived Ellacuría and the other Jesuits as intellectual godfathers of the FMLN." Basically, as Brackley pointed out, "Ellacuría and fellow Jesuits Segundo Montés, Ignacio Martín-Baro, and Jon Sobrino recognized that the cause of the poor was just and that the armed forces fought to preserve an unjust status quo, with terror, torture, and murder of civilians as an integral part of a counter-insurgency strategy. They repeatedly denounced abuses by government security forces and allied death squads."²⁰

The murders of the six Jesuits and a domestic employee and her young daughter met with worldwide horror and a universal call to end the bloody Salvadoran conflict. Brackley wrote:

The murders activated a political earthquake, both in El Salvador and abroad. Inside the country this became the crime that refused to go away. A few years later a high-ranking Salvadoran officer would confide to Ellacuría's successor, Francisco Estrada, that the killings of the Jesuits had done more damage to the Salvadoran armed forces than eleven years of guerrilla warfare. By badly undermining the prestige of the armed forces, the "Jesuit case" helped consolidate the peace process once the accords were signed two years after the murders.

Beyond El Salvador, shock waves reverberated far and wide, but nowhere more than in the United States. . . . By November of 1989, people had stopped following events in El Salvador. The State Department had succeeded in selling its version of reality: The U.S. was helping to consolidate democracy. Our military aid had succeeded in professionalizing the Salvadoran armed forces. The UCA murders woke us from our bipartisan slumber. Outrage spread across the U.S.²¹

That shock and outrage can be heard in the words of Sacred Heart University Professor Robin McAllister, who after visiting the site of the Jesuit massacre with the first delegation from the University in 1992, wrote that the Jesuits "were not just priests and martyrs but intellectuals and university professors as well. The UCA is a beautiful suburban university high up the slopes of San Salvador

volcano, an oasis of civilized, affluent culture, in the midst of an otherwise war-torn city. It is no more possible to imagine soldiers shooting down university officials here than imagining them storming and shooting through Sacred Heart University."²²

On our campus, the response to the murders of the Jesuits would forever alter our relationship with the country of El Salvador. Immediately, there was the sense that the University needed to become more involved, to take a stand against the atrocities of the warring factions and the death squads, and to act in support of those voices that championed the causes of the country's poor while at the same time seeking a peaceful solution to the civil war. Years later President Cernera recalled those times and the need for a new level of commitment to El Salvador "as a response to the assassination of the rector and priest-professors of the Jesuit university in San Salvador and their house-keepers." Then he said, "As an act of solidarity with that university community as well as with the Church in El Salvador, Sacred Heart University conferred the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa*, upon Archbishop Rivera Damas of El Salvador at a special academic convocation on May 17, 1990. During that convocation we committed ourselves to a long-term process of learning about and responding to the needs of the Salvadoran people."²³

Support in this country for the efforts of the Archbishop who had assumed the mantle of the slain Romero was crucial because he too had been singled out for execution by right-wing extremists. Speaking of his precarious situation when the Jesuits were murdered, Archbishop Damas said, "Bishop Rosa Chávez and I could have died too on that night. Our names were on the list of *Plan Djakarta*, whose aim was the physical elimination of all of those who denounce human rights violations and the system of injustice here in El Salvador."²⁴ The citation read at the conferral of the honorary doctorate praised Damas as "a man of God; a man guided by a rich, strong interior life; a man not afraid to speak out for the rights of others; a man full of faith, devotion and the conviction to spread God's message even at the risk of death."²⁵

But for several people in the audience, the question remained: What was the next step for Sacred Heart University? The

President spoke about committing "a long-term process of learning about and responding to the needs of the Salvadoran people," but how? That question was answered on October 30, 1991, when Dr. Gerald Reid of the Sociology Department and the director of the Center for Ethnic Studies, submitted a proposal to the University administration, suggesting that a delegation be sent to El Salvador, "to provide Sacred Heart University faculty with international experience and to establish a long-term relationship and dialogue between Sacred Heart University and appropriate partners in El Salvador."²⁶ The President, who knew from working with the poor that face-to-face meetings with the people of El Salvador would have a dramatic and lasting effect on members of the University community willing to risk such a journey, welcomed the delegation idea, and planning for the first trip began in earnest.

Suffice it to say, Sacred Heart University was changed by reaching out to El Salvador, sometimes subtly and sometimes in ways dramatic and obvious. As Cernera later pointed out in the opening paragraph of his essay on El Salvador in the *Sacred Heart University Review*, "At the end of its four-day visit to Sacred Heart University, the accreditation team from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges captured something of our ongoing efforts to embody our mission as a comprehensive Catholic university in the world when it stated: 'A university that sends a dozen faculty members to El Salvador for several weeks to better understand that country's problems and to seek a way of assisting its people is taking its mission very seriously.'"²⁷

CHAPTER THREE

The Broken Heart Experience

The energy and spirit unleashed by the El Salvador experience is at the heart of what eventually transpired with service and volunteerism on campus in the 1990s and beyond. In fact, a strong case could be made that most of the school's recent service initiatives—including the 30,000 Hours Project, the start of service-learning options in the classroom, Operation Bridgeport, Community Connections, CURTIS Week, the St. Charles/SHU Health and Wellness Center; and the Catholic Social Thought Scholars program—all trace back to the trips to El Salvador, and what came to be known as “the broken heart experience.” Eilene Bertsch, the assistant vice-president for academic affairs, and one of two administrative members of the first delegation, reminiscing about the story of service at the University, said, “The thing that is so important to me about this story is that it has its origins in a place that literally is on the other side of the world. The fact that Sacred Heart University now has what I think of as a love affair with St. Charles Parish and the people of the East Side of Bridgeport, came out of what for many of us was a very transformative experience in El Salvador. It was a gift of the Salvadoran people to us that we’ve come to know our own neighbors right down the block.”¹ How this happened, and how the “broken heart experience” affected members of the delegations that visited El Salvador is at the core of this chapter.²

With Dr. Reid's rationale for the trip to El Salvador on the table, several pieces of a complicated puzzle had to fit into place

before a trip could become a reality. First, why fund a delegation to a small Central American country by University dollars that, the skeptics and critics would say, could be put to better use on the Park Avenue campus? Secondly, would a group of faculty and administrators be willing to undergo the rigors of such a trip, especially since in the fall of 1991 a civil war still was raging in that country? And even if people were willing to sign on for such an experience, who would set the itinerary? Finally, how would it be possible to ready a delegation when several members most likely would not be fluent in Spanish, knew little of the history and culture of El Salvador beyond what they had read in the press, and felt far from prepared to become "witnesses for peace" in solidarity with the poor and oppressed in a distant third-world country?

Early discussions on the feasibility of a tour, including the roles played by Fr. David Blanchard, a Carmelite priest working in El Salvador, and Minor Sinclair, the director of the Ecumenical Program on Central America and the Caribbean (EPICA), were recalled by Reid in an e-mail: "As I remember it, at the time Dave was serving on the board of EPICA and it was through Dave that we became connected with the EPICA folks, including Minor Sinclair, who was then the director. I arranged a meeting with Dave, Minor, and President Cernera at the University; on that first visit to campus I think they also met with faculty. These meetings were successful and thus began a series of meetings to recruit faculty and organize the first delegation. Much of this occurred during the fall semester prior to the first delegation."³ Bertsch also recalled those early days, and particularly how the President hoped the experience would tie in with the University's mission. "That fall Dr. Cernera had asked a group of us if we might consider taking a journey with no other objective than 'to listen and learn from the poor.'"⁴ Following three planning sessions held in the fall of 1991, Reid organized monthly seminars during the spring semester on the country's history and current political realities, and the role of the church and the universities. Then he held planning meetings with Dave Blanchard and Minor Sinclair, among others. At the same time, Dr. Torreira met weekly with the members of the El Salvador group, tutoring them in elementary Spanish.

While the delegation worked to prepare for the trip, the peace accords were signed on February 1, 1992, signaling the end of the bitter conflict in El Salvador and easing the fears of delegation members about traveling to a country engaged in a war. But as our group discovered upon its arrival in El Salvador, though the peace accords were in effect and the country was under martial law with the military presence everywhere, death squads continued to operate with impunity, the statistics for violence and crime were at an all-time high, and a just peace was far from a reality. "We are living in extremely dangerous times," Blanchard told us, speaking of the period directly after the signing of the accords. "All across this country, in town after town, people are disappearing. This period right now is more dangerous than any other time in recent memory. There is the illusion of well-being in the land."⁵

Meanwhile, Minor Sinclair traveled to El Salvador in late March and early April to begin organizing the trip. In his report to the University, Sinclair wrote that the pedagogical model for the trip was "based on experiential learning through visits to poor communities, dialogue with the poor about their search for solutions, and meetings with representatives of different sectors of society." Then Sinclair suggested these objectives: "During my consultations in El Salvador, a number of individuals recommended that Sacred Heart University address two broad issues as a way of understanding all of the different experiences in the peace process and the search for a popular alternative (the development of policies and institutions that enable and empower the poor). Without exception, people encouraged Sacred Heart to see this delegation as a move towards establishing an ongoing relationship with a counterpart in El Salvador which will serve to contribute to the consolidation of peace." In closing his report, Sinclair wrote, "The educational value of this kind of delegation experience, in terms of globalization of concerns and North-South exchange, will be of immense value to Sacred Heart. It will help the faculty of Sacred Heart understand the mission of the university in society."⁶ About the same time, in an article announcing the June trip in the campus paper, Reid said that "this project offers an unprecedented opportunity for Sacred Heart to

reflect on and live out its mission as a Catholic, liberal arts university in service to the broader community."⁷

Objectives for an El Salvador Trip

Several objectives for the trip were recalled by Reid in his introduction to "Notes on El Salvador," published in the *Sacred Heart University Review*:

First, the delegation was to be a faculty development activity designed to provide the participants with international experience and opportunities to pursue new or existing research interests. Second, the delegation was to be an opportunity for faculty and staff to learn first-hand about issues related to El Salvador and Latin America and to communicate what they had learned to the rest of the Sacred Heart community through their teaching and other activities. A third objective was to lay the groundwork for an institutional relationship between Sacred Heart University and an appropriate academic partner in El Salvador. It was hoped that such a relationship would eventually include faculty and student exchanges between the partners. A fourth objective was for the University to play a constructive role in fostering a North-South dialogue that would contribute to the peace process in El Salvador. Related to this was a final objective, which was to place Sacred Heart University in community with the poor and oppressed in that country.⁸

Beyond the stated objectives above, the underlying hope was that the trip would be a transforming experience for the members of the delegation, making us more aware of the daily realities of the poor and more apt to become activists for social justice. "Education within Catholic colleges and universities," wrote Cernera after participating in a trip to El Salvador in 1996, "ought to provide opportunities for members of its communities to have their hearts opened and thus transformed. The opening of our hearts will, more often than not, involve a process of having our

hearts being broken by the pain and suffering of others. For many of us who have been touched by the people of El Salvador through our study tours, our hearts have been broken and transformed.”⁹ Clearly, the hope was that the experience would forge a core group of University people who would return to campus filled with the spirit of the Salvadoran people and ready to assume responsibility for helping direct the school’s future community outreach initiatives.

Before the start of the journey to the country of the Saviour, most delegation members had only a limited awareness of what they would encounter and the consequences of those experiences, although an inkling of what lay ahead was apparent through meetings with Minor Sinclair, Dave Blanchard, and finally Jennifer Casolo. A native of Thomaston, Connecticut, and a witness for peace employed by Christian Education Seminars when she was jailed in El Salvador, Casolo visited the University in the spring, met with the delegation, and gave a chilling first-hand testimony about the realities of the war in El Salvador. Suspected of being a guerrilla sympathizer involved in the resistance, she told us:

In the jail, I remember being brought into a small cell, and two officers accompanied me. I could hear people screaming in the other cells as they were being tortured. One of my interrogators was rough and angry, the other seemed to be more on my side. They kept asking me these questions, and finally the nicer of the two men told the other one to leave.

When that man went out the door, the other one turned, locked the door, and faced me, and as he turned toward me, I knew at that moment I was facing death. Suddenly a very strange thing happened to me. Beyond his face I could see all the faces of people who had died for the cause of peace and freedom in El Salvador, and at that moment I was filled with the spirit of the martyrs. I was not afraid to die.¹⁰

Jennifer’s story of terror and torture shocked the members of the delegation and at the same time introduced us to a “presence” that would be encountered time and again in El Salvador, a powerful,

palpable force "filled with the spirit of the martyrs," as she put it. But it was not a reality that the group was either ready for or necessarily even willing to submit to. After all, we were faculty and administrators accustomed to the lecture hall and the committee meeting, not stories and scenes from hell. "We journeyed to El Salvador," said Bertsch, "to listen and learn, to foster academic connections where possible; to reflect on how our experiences might influence our work and our relationships at Sacred Heart University. But to grieve, to be transformed, to struggle to find a language to deal with the life of the spirit? I am not sure I willingly would have embraced such a goal."¹¹

Another member of the original delegation, Robin McAllister, put it this way:

What was Sacred Heart doing sending a delegation of college professors down to El Salvador? Why not Poland, Haiti, or East Main Street in Bridgeport, for that matter? Could this trip, undefined for most of us as we began the trip, be justified in terms of the University's mission statement? What were we supposed to see and do? . . . So before I went on the trip I had already thought much about the history and situation of professors and teachers in El Salvador. I wondered what the proper role of a university and university professors was in a society in which the army of your own country can mount an armed attack on your campus, kill your rector, occupy your buildings, blow up laboratories and fossil collections, sell not just rare books from the library, but even the glass panes out of the windows. . . . So I came to El Salvador ready to listen to stories.¹²

The Stories of the People

Members of the first and subsequent delegations soon realized after setting foot on Salvadoran soil, it was one thing to read in the newspapers or to see and hear on television the tragedies of war in a foreign country, but it was quite another experience to be there and view the devastation first-hand; to listen to the stories

of people who suffered the atrocities committed during wartime; and to witness the love and generosity, hope and courage of a people who worked at surviving from day to day while maintaining an enduring sense of the spiritual in their lives as well as an unwavering hope for the future. "They have nothing," said Blanchard about the Salvadorans. "They don't even know where their next meal will come from. But they will greet you with open arms, and will go without food to prepare feasts for you. They are a warm, loving people, and their spirit will touch you in ways that you can't imagine."¹³ Prophetic words, indeed.

The first group from Sacred Heart University arrived at San Salvador Airport on June 12, 1992. That evening Mirna Anaya, the widow of the assassinated former president of the non-governmental Human Rights Commission of El Salvador, welcomed us, and briefed us on the present situation in her country. "It is important for you to be here, and so I would like to welcome you, and thank you for coming," said Mirna. "It is a moment in time when we can find out how much political space we have been given by the peace accords."¹⁴ At the same time, Mirna talked about the spirit of the Salvadoran people. "The situation here is so critical, and of such profound crises, that people do things that under normal circumstances would not be possible. It is an energy that comes from the *pueblo*. A sense of the people. Maybe that's what you call *mystica*. And that is why the people who are dead are not dead. They are still alive. This is something that helps me to understand the mystery of the Resurrection. People who have died ten years ago, or three years ago, are still alive. In fact, they are working harder today."¹⁵ Six months later, on January 3, 1993, Mirna discovered the limits of her own political space. According to a news report, she "was attacked by gunmen while traveling with her family in El Salvador. . . . After stopping the Anaya vehicle with a red police-type light, six masked men fired a dozen times, wounding Miguel Ernesto Anaya (age 15) in his right side."¹⁶ Mirna, who was the vice-president and former general coordinator of the Central American Human Rights Commission, miraculously escaped the bullets of the death squad.

In the days to follow, Mirna's words echoed in our minds as we listened to horrific stories of families divided by the war, of

fathers fighting sons and brothers fighting brothers, of decimated families uprooted and sent scurrying across the mountains into exile in refugee camps in Nicaragua and Honduras, of massacres of entire villages, and of the heroic acts of Salvadorans and international peace activists who "accompanied" them during the bitter struggle. "For ten days we listened and learned," wrote Bertsch in her essay "Beyond Death and Destruction—Faith and Hope" in the *Sacred Heart University Review*.

Later, in repatriated communities of Salvadorans who had spent years in exile in Nicaragua and Honduras, we heard of the women's struggle to survive, to resist the power of guns and helicopters and armed militia to destroy their families and communities. We learned of the steps they had taken to provide a line of defense to protect the lives of their husbands and sons and brothers. We heard of their eventual flight into the hills; of the pain of childbirth under the welcoming protection of a tree; of the loss of a beloved child to measles for lack of medical care; and of the "help of the Sisters" in their exhausting and terrifying journey across the border. And everywhere, we were welcomed and embraced as sisters and brothers.¹⁷

At first, because of the pain caused to those who recounted the stories of their war-torn lives, members of the delegation questioned if it would be better not to invite the people to recall such atrocities. But Sinclair dispelled that notion. "Your job," he said early in the trip during a visit to a *cumunidad* called Nueva Esperanza, "is to listen to their stories, to observe as much as you can, then construct your own version of what has happened here in El Salvador. When you return to the U.S., your job is to bear witness to the struggles of these people."¹⁸ The stories had to be told, he said, so the truth would be known, and because—as Minor, Blanchard and others assured the delegation—telling the stories was cathartic and therapeutic for people scarred by the war.

Early in the trip, as we began constructing our own versions of *la realidad nacional* in El Salvador, searching for ways to

understand the meaning of the stories we heard, we began to reflect on the larger question: How would this experience inform our lives when we returned to Fairfield County? For Torreira, charged by members of the student organization *La Hispanidad* to adopt an elementary school, the question of appropriate action was already a given. "The members of *La Hispanidad* had told me that they wanted to do something for the Salvadoran children, help them somehow to get an education so they could have a brighter future," she wrote in her essay "Reflections on California." "They all agreed that I should choose the most needy school, and precisely the first one I saw was the one I finally picked."¹⁹

Then Torreira explained her rationale for selecting that particular school:

This school is located on the Hacienda La California. It is a small wooden building, without divisions, just a very large room in very bad condition. At first I thought it was a chicken coop. It had not occurred to me that it could be a school, but it is. More than 200 children attend for four hours a day and are taught by two teachers who try to divide their time among the six grades which they must instruct. They lack supplies; they have practically nothing, only the hope that things will get better, as well as faith and pride in themselves, their capacity to survive, and their ability to succeed in the midst of the worst conditions.²⁰

For the rest of us without a specific charge to carry out—other than to listen and observe and be open to what was happening—it was enough to understand that a series of ongoing, emotionally and psychologically wrenching events that spoke directly to the heart were taking place. Our response bordered on incredulity. "How can there be such goodness and caring and cooperation and help in a place that was absolutely, totally, utterly—from our perspective—without any hope whatsoever?" asked Bertsch. "The one thing that came through was that there was extraordinary hope, and there was extraordinary life, and there was a spirit that

we didn't have the ability to even understand. We just kept looking at it, as if it were out there, but where did it come from? What let it be? These people and their situations, I can only say, spoke to our hearts rather than our minds."²¹ In much the same way, talking about the Salvadoran people, Reid wrote, "Throughout our visit to El Salvador, I was time and again impressed by the spirit and power of the Salvadoran people—their generosity amidst great poverty, their optimism in the wake of the most trying and terrifying experiences, their hope to change a society devastated by the fighting and bloodletting of twelve long years of civil war."²²

How was it possible, the members of the delegation wondered, that these people, who suffered so long because of a U.S.-supported war, could welcome the group with open arms? Jean Stokan, who joined the 1996 delegation for a few days, spoke of the extent of the U.S. involvement in the war in her poem "Who Are the Terrorists?":

But I had just been to El Salvador
and met teachers who were tortured
not by accident, but by design
tens of thousands of them and workers, catechists,
Jesuits, children
killed
by a military to whom *we* gave over one million
dollars a day
And I stood in a home in Corral de Piedra ten days
after it was bombed
they were still scraping from the walls
parts of children's brains, embedded deep from
the force
and I saw a tuft of hair on the floor
and in the yard bullet casings made in Illinois
and I ask, who are the terrorists?²³

Bertsch, talking to a class about her visit to El Salvador, spoke about the sense of dislocation and disbelief that the group experienced over the role of the U.S. military in the war and the

treatment of the group as it traveled from one community in El Salvador to another:

I think it was the tie to the U.S. military that began to stun us. It became clearer and clearer as we went through and we heard the voices of the people. We listened to the people in the FMLN, we listened to people in our own government, we met with religious, civic, social leaders. And it became clearer and clearer that the United States' role in arming the military had been a very forceful and a strong one. And it created another sort of difficult time for us because we could not understand—given the fact that so many died and there was so much brutality and the massacres were so impossibly awful—that we would be greeted and accepted and welcomed and loved the way we were. That was the other dislocation for us. Because we were treated with extraordinary warmth and courtesy and love. It's very hard for me to think about. I went to hear a talk about the nature of forgiveness yesterday, and it's very hard for me to think of forgiveness in the context in which they were living, in which everything, everything was gone. But we were treated as if somehow we were their brothers and sisters, and there was no question about that.²⁴

But as Sinclair explained to us, the people of El Salvador somehow were able to distinguish between the policies of the U.S. government backing the war and its citizens, some of whom unknowingly went along with the policy of stemming the tide of Communism in Central America, while others acted as witnesses to the peace process by protesting our involvement to elected officials in Washington, or in some cases by physically accompanying the Salvadoran people during their crisis.

The Universities and the Struggle for Peace

During that first trip to El Salvador two experiences directly impacted our group's thinking about service, and both involved

visits to academic institutions: the University of El Salvador (the university of the *compesinos* in downtown San Salvador), and the University of Central America (the Jesuit-run university catering to wealthy Central Americans). Both institutions were ravaged by the war, and both—each in its own way—persevered in the fight for a just peace.

Situated in the middle of the teeming capital city of San Salvador, the University of El Salvador had been reduced to a rubble—a bullet-ridden, earthquake-shattered monument of tenacity in a world that did everything possible to close it down. Viewed as a hotbed of leftist political activity and a breeding ground for FMLN guerrilla leaders, the University suffered continual assaults, assassinations, and forced closings by government forces during the war. Sinclair wrote:

A group of twelve members of the faculty and administration of Sacred Heart University plus myself . . . visited the University of El Salvador (UES) for three days in June 1992. . . . A walking tour of the campus revealed the devastation of war and natural disaster: twenty-two buildings (60% of the physical infrastructure) bombed or otherwise destroyed, the pock-marked walls of classrooms, laboratories whose equipment had been stolen by the Army, and everywhere the silent pictures of martyrs of the University. In the past fifteen years, the University has been occupied by the Salvadoran military four times, one rector has been machine-gunned to death, the entire University administration rounded up and jailed and the University itself force into exile.

As we ended our tour, SHU sociology professor Gerald Reid turned to me and said, "Imagine what it would be like to teach here. Can you imagine it?" For those three days we tried to imagine what it would be like to teach at "the University which refuses to die," a name given to the UES after the military invaded and closed down the University in 1980.²⁵

But in spite of the University's horrific history during the war, and in spite of shell-scarred walls and earthquake damaged

buildings, not only did it survive, it managed under the most trying of circumstances to carry out a program of student social action with the poor and oppressed that amazed our delegation.

The Social Outreach Program

Sinclair wrote that the UES was "deeply committed to the liberation of the poor. . . . 'Our finest education takes place in the communities,' said UES rector Fabio Castillo . . . describing their social outreach program known as *proyeccion social*. UES students are required to undertake 500 hours of internships which takes them to innovative dental clinics in poor communities such as Los Olivos, which the Sacred Heart delegation visited, or communities repopulated by returned refugees, or to provisional schools to assist the reintegration of the guerrilla ex-combatants. 'Field work' is a major part of their pedagogy."²⁶

The concept clearly impressed our group. Five hundred hours of community service to graduate? If UES students could complete a service requirement under conditions involving great personal risk, why couldn't our students back home become more involved in community volunteer work? "Why are our grammar, secondary, and university schools not engaging students more in social action curricula?" asked Scott Willison, a delegation member from the Education Department. "How often have our students been asked to make personal sacrifices for the betterment of the community or a particular individual? In principle, El Salvador's National University requires of its students 500 hours of community service before they are allowed to receive their bachelor's degree. . . . How many hours of community involvement do our students participate in without expecting money or personal recognition? What examples do our adults and institutions set?"²⁷ Similarly, Dr. Thomas Trebon, the academic vice president and provost and a member of the delegation, said simply, "We need to think of ways in which our students could be similarly involved in community volunteer projects."²⁸

Aside from inciting thought about service initiatives on the Fairfield campus, several other projects resulted from the meetings

at the UES. First, Cernera had charged the group to search for ways to form a cooperative agreement between a university in El Salvador and Sacred Heart "to contribute to the mutual benefit to both institutions." That charge translated into an agreement, drawn up and signed by the presidents of both institutions on February 8, 1993. Article I stated: "Sacred Heart University and the National University of El Salvador agree to collaborate and exchange experiences in teaching and research, with the specific purpose of updating and training the faculty members of both Universities, training Salvadoran North American professionals, sharing experiences and Salvadoran and U.S. faculty, and students as well as the business and law community." Furthermore, the agreement called for promoting "faculty and student exchanges using all available means."²⁹

To underscore Sacred Heart University's commitment to the agreement, and to honor the life-work of an outstanding educator, Cernera invited UES Rector Fabio Castillo Figueroa to the Fairfield campus to receive an honorary doctorate on March 8, 1993. Held in Hawley Lounge, the special academic convocation marked an emotional highpoint for the members of the University's first El Salvador delegation and for many in attendance because the honorary doctorate awarded to the Rector of the besieged National University signaled Sacred Heart University's affirmation of the work of a respected leader of academicians and our continued willingness to support El Salvador's struggle for a more meaningful peace. The citation read in Spanish and English at the ceremony opened with these words:

The ravages of war have not been kind to the University of El Salvador (Universidad Nacional de El Salvador), which is referred to affectionately as *Alma Mater*. Today, students at the 150-year-old University study in classrooms with bullet-ridden walls, linger near the ruins of buildings destroyed by war and the force of a deadly earthquake, pause to respectfully gaze at pictures of University martyrs tacked up or painted on walls, trees and fences around campus. Though physically its resources are despoiled, the spirit of the University lives

through the vision of Dr. Fabio Castillo Figueroa, revered in his country as "The Grandfather of Education."³⁰

At the ceremony, President Cernera praised the work of Dr. Castillo and the Salvadoran people in the language of the heart. "Our staff and faculty came back to us last summer with heartbreaking and heartwarming stories of struggle and transcendence," Cernera said to the Rector. "They told us stories of a people that, despite catastrophic tragedy, were engaged in a social action agenda that goes far beyond anything most of us in this nation have ever experienced." Cernera then went on to say, "The awakening of the Salvadorans, their organizing, their overcoming of individual agendas to work as a community, their faith, and sheer goodwill, are a numinous teaching, a lesson in community far more moving and powerful than any textbook. The Salvadoran people have infected us with examples of hope, self-sacrifice and love. Your people, Dr. Castillo, bring us a generous affirmation of our own humanity and connectedness. You introduce us to God."³¹ At the ceremony's conclusion, Castillo received a rousing, standing ovation.

Another immediate result of the agreement between the two universities was a spring 1993 trip to El Salvador by Professors Louise Spence and Rebecca Abbott of the Media Studies Department to instruct the media faculty at the UES "in the theory and practice of video editing." Abbott and Spence in a memo to President Cernera seeking University support for the trip, explained that the UES had "a number of years of video collected documenting the University's struggle during the conflict in El Salvador, which they urgently need to edit into viewable form."³² Other immediate outcomes of the agreement included Torreira's initiative to transfer a language lab to the UES campus, and the commitment to send books and journals from our library to the National University library which had been decimated during the war.

Still another result of the agreement was for Sacred Heart to co-host, along with two other universities, a delegation of 12 faculty members and administrators from the UES in March of 1994 as part of a U.S. Agency for International Development

training program. "The members of the El Salvador delegation are drawn from health-related disciplines, including medicine, medical technology, and dentistry," reported an article in the *Connecticut Post*. "During their five-day stay in Connecticut they will visit classes and health facilities in the region, meet with faculty, and receive training in academic support services, faculty development and strategic planning." The article concluded by noting "a second delegation of eighteen faculty members from the University of El Salvador will travel to Sacred Heart in late May for the second phase of the training program."³³

The Broken Heart Lecture

One more message needed to be driven home in the minds of the delegation, that message delivered by a Jesuit rector from the University of Central America (UCA) who had answered the call to take up the work of the Jesuits assassinated by the military in 1989. Dean Brackley, S.J., who had taught at Fordham University and worked as a community organizer for six years in the South Bronx, was teaching social ethics to graduate students at the UCA and was specially equipped to help us bring together the several strands of the El Salvador experience into a coherent, compelling call for social action.³⁴

Recalling Brackley's meeting with the group, Bertsch said:

On the one hand, he talked to us about the poor and the role of the university in preparing people to think about their place with respect to issues of social justice. And he lectured us about what he called the "broken heart" experience—that you will never learn, you never understand, and you will never be able to communicate with genuine community until you have had your heart broken. For us, we didn't need very much of a lecture about that because not only were we emotionally drained at this point, but we had had an experience that wasn't fully integrated into our way of thinking or doing or being. We might say an "out of body" experience. We knew something extraordinary had happened. Some

people say "transformation." Other people might find other words for it, but we knew that it was not something likely to happen to us again. And he was part of it. He put a name on it. He called it the "broken heart" experience.

Finally he looked at us and said, "You know, coming to El Salvador was a very important thing for you to do, but you do not need to go to El Salvador to find your neighbor. You need to look down the block and find your neighbor in Bridgeport." And we sat there and thought how much easier it had been for us to get on a plane and fly to a war-torn country, and put our trust in people we had never met, whose language we did not share, than it had been for us to think about taking a bus down Park Avenue and going into Bridgeport. And it caused us to come back and to do an enormous amount of soul-searching. Because that phrase couldn't leave our minds.³⁵

Speaking on the same topic to the second group of faculty and administrators to visit El Salvador a year later, Brackley added, "I think this kind of 'broken heart' experience provides the soil on which the data can bear fruit in our educational teaching. So it is extremely important in the course of our university studies that we encounter the poor." Reiterating his message to the previous delegation he said, "It requires, I'm convinced, an experience like El Salvador. Maybe an experience in Bridgeport. In fact, you don't have to come here. You just have to have your heart broken."³⁶

On the implications of the "broken heart" experience for a university curriculum, Brackley said, "It seems to me the fundamental thing you do in freshman year is to ask some serious questions. People are going through multiple identity crises in the university, and we want to get more healthy background or content into those identity crises. So how do we get people asking serious questions? Do a little work in a shelter for homeless people and reflect on it, systematically, academically." Then speaking directly to our group, Brackley said, "I think the university has as its agenda, ruining your lives. And having this

experience of the poor sets your agenda. All I mean to say is that we would hope you would be Christian revolutionaries for the rest of your lives. And that doesn't come unless your heart has been broken." And finally, Brackley added this perspective: "What we are all becoming aware of, here as well as in the States, is that the necessary revolution—using the language of Paul VI, the 'radical transformation'—has to take place from the ground up. From Bridgeport up, from the South Bronx up, from the suburbs up. And it's got to be grassroots work."³⁷

In a later memo to Cernera suggesting that the Jesuit be invited to speak on the SHU campus, Reid wrote that Brackley

spoke to us about the relationship between university and community (what role ought the university to be playing? what are the goals of the university in its relationship with the wider community? in this respect, what responsibility does the university have with regards to its students? how are these questions to be answered by a *Catholic* university?) and about the role of faculty as teachers in this relationship. He impressed upon us the need for faculty in their role as teachers to increase students' awareness of the world around them, and particularly of social injustice and the sources of social injustice, or, as he put it, the need to "break students' hearts." It strikes me that his ideas are quite relevant to our own university, especially at this time with our efforts in Global Studies, community service, and other areas.³⁸

In meetings in El Salvador, in his *Sacred Heart University Review* essay, and finally with his lecture on campus, Brackley offered a cohesive educational vision for a Catholic institution, particularly one whose mission statement proclaimed the need to make a difference in the lives of the poor.

A Time for Reflection

On our last day in El Salvador, a meeting was held to reflect on what had been seen and heard: to impose some semblance of

meaning on the experience, and to brainstorm possible action plans for the Fairfield campus. One point was certain. The experience in El Salvador spoke to the participants' hearts, and left us with a desire to get more involved in social action at home. As a measure of that commitment, Reid recalled that we responded with a list of twenty-two ideas and suggestions for El Salvador-related projects (including guest speakers, panel discussions, plans to integrate the El Salvador experience into courses, photo exhibits, a follow up on several initiatives at the UES, interviews with local media, meetings with elected officials, a special issue of the *Sacred Heart University Review*, and the involvement of students with subsequent delegations).³⁹

When we sat in reflection while a torrential rain fell outside the cafeteria of the Pastoral Retreat House high on the side of San Salvador's volcano and came up with those twenty-two follow-up suggestions, there was no way we could foresee the flowering of social action projects that would eventually take place back at the University as a result of the experiences in the land of "The Saviour." "The reality is that those who come back and who still come back, come back changed," said Bertsch. "How you explain it, and how you define that change . . . they come back changed, and they have had an impact on this University. It would not be exactly the same University it is now if we had not had some of those experiences."⁴⁰

CHAPTER FOUR

Keeping the Promise

I n the aftermath of the broken heart experience in El Salvador, a flurry of related activities took place on campus in the fall of 1992—including writing and editing essays for “Notes on El Salvador” to appear in the *Sacred Heart University Review*, collating a traveling photo exhibit of the trip, and readying slide presentations with talks. At the same time, while the University community—the fraternities, sororities, and staff—continued to volunteer in the area, one service event stood out because it engaged the energies of a large contingent of people from the campus and support from several local towns and the city of Bridgeport.

The Make a Difference Day Challenge

In mid-August, *USA Weekend* ran an article entitled “You can make a difference” about the successes of the first Make a Difference Day challenge held the previous year. “Wouldn’t it be great,” the article asked, “if everyone spent one day helping others?” The article noted that “readers in nearly 1,400 cities cleaned up neighborhoods, fed the hungry, built and repaired homes for the needy, visited the sick and gave hope in thousands of other ways.”¹ *USA Weekend’s* sponsorship of the second Make a Difference Day prompted this announcement from the University’s Public Relations department: “As an institution whose

mission is based on the belief that it has a responsibility to share its resources and its special gifts and talents for the betterment of the human community, Sacred Heart University is participating in 'Make a Difference day,' Saturday, November 14." The memo then stated, "Everyone of us has the capability to help others in some way, no matter how small the effort. Our hope is that the students, faculty, and staff of Sacred Heart University will donate some time during this day in an activity that helps our community and the people in it."²

Efforts to coordinate a campus response to the Make a Difference Day challenge fell into the capable hands of Alice Chaves, a former editor of the school paper, the *Spectrum*, and a recent alumna working as an assistant in the office of Public Relations. Chaves "solicited 'Make a Difference Day' proclamations from six area towns (Bridgeport, Fairfield, Trumbull, Easton, Monroe, Stratford)," then coordinated nine University-supported volunteer events throughout the area with support from "over 100 students, faculty and staff," announced a Public Relations news release. In the same release President Cernera said, "We have an ongoing commitment to encouraging our entire community to get involved in helping others—in truly making a difference."³

In response to the success of the day's events, Ginny Apple, the director of Public Relations, issued a "note of congratulations and celebration" to the volunteers, saying that "many students were so touched that they expect to return to the sites of their volunteer efforts, to continue this important work." After praising Chaves for her efforts, Apple thanked everyone who participated, saying "You have made Sacred-Heart University very proud."⁴

The following spring, while a second delegation readied itself for the trip to El Salvador, another Apple memo highlighted several current University service efforts: treating eighty people from five homeless shelters to a musical, sponsoring a bowl-a-thon, donating time and labor for Habitat For Humanity in Bridgeport, continuing the active partnership with the Jonathan Winthrop Elementary School, and the formation of a campus organization called PEACE (People Effectively Achieving Community Efforts).⁵ But beyond these ongoing volunteer activities a large question loomed on the horizon, begging a response. September 1993

marked the start of the school's thirtieth anniversary. What would be a fitting way to celebrate that milestone? Was there an initiative that would reflect Sacred Heart's mission statement as well as its emerging vision of itself as a leading Catholic institution in New England?

Naming a Project

With the advantage of hindsight it is easy to see how the need to come up with a project, coupled with several past volunteer efforts (the school's long history of service, the group experiences of El Salvador, and the success of the Make a Difference Day), came together to form "Keeping the Promise: 30,000 Hours." In a sense, the project was almost inevitable. Once the issue of discovering appropriate ways to celebrate the anniversary was raised, it was only a matter of time before a proposal was on the table that pulled together the disparate elements on key people's minds. First, the notion of "service." With the University's record of community involvement, service belonged at the core of any proposal. Then there was that thought haunting the El Salvador delegates: Why had it been so much easier to fly to a war-torn country to bear witness to the plight of the poor than it was to travel ten minutes down Park Avenue to be with the poor of Bridgeport? And what about the service commitment of students in El Salvador to fulfill graduation requirements?

Then, finally, there was the historical link with Southwestern Connecticut: Sacred Heart University in its early years had flourished while drawing students from the immediate area. So the thinking was: Why not give back to the local community, especially at a time when Bridgeport was infested by gangs and drugs, traumatized economically by the loss of thousands of factory jobs, and when a sizable portion of the population lived stifled lives under a multi-generational welfare system that perpetuated poverty not unlike that found in third-world countries. Bridgeport was under siege, crying out for help. Call it blind luck, or happenstance, or divine providence, but it was only a matter of time before someone brought all these elements together into a cohesive proposal.

Planning for the Anniversary

To backtrack a bit, Dr. Trebon had started the planning for the "Thirtieth Anniversary Celebration" by sending a memo on May 6, 1992, to thirty-two key faculty, administrators, and staff, inviting them "to participate on a planning committee charged with developing plans for the Thirtieth Anniversary Celebration." The purpose of the meeting, according to the memo, was "to set forth initial ideas regarding the celebration. The academic year 1993-94 marks the time period for which we need to plan. Several events have already been suggested. I see this steering committee as developing a set of recommended activities, suggesting individuals who might lead a particular effort, and deciding which of the efforts a member of the committee might wish to lead or participate in."⁶ At that meeting, several ideas for the celebration surfaced, and select members of the group were asked to meet over the coming months to develop and refine proposals.

By the start of the spring 1993 semester, the group had generated a list of Thirtieth Anniversary activities. On February 11, at a meeting that included Dr. Trebon, Ginny Apple, and Joanne Tilghman, the director of Special Events, several initiatives proposed were based on "activities which we would normally do during the year." The memo following that meeting noted, "we will include perhaps four or five special events which are specific to the Thirtieth Anniversary year," and acknowledged that the coming year would "focus attention on our past history, our current transformation as an institution and our future activities with special mention of our contributions to the community."⁷ In other words, by February of 1993, plans for the anniversary year highlighted several events, including a special liturgy, the annual Discovery Dinner, academic lectures, special emphasis on annual activities during the academic year, and the development of a logo, a time capsule, school banners around campus, and related activities. But plans still lacked a focusing initiative to capture the imagination and serve as a rallying point for the year. As of yet, no mention had been made of the centerpiece of the celebration: the 30,000 Hours project.

Soon after the February meeting, Eilene Bertsch recalled that she was preoccupied by the memory of what the students at the University of El Salvador were required to accomplish for graduation. "It just blew my mind," she said. "Here was a university that had nothing, that was in decay—between bombs and earthquakes—and these students had to do 500 hours of community service in order to graduate. We saw them in the barrios, distributing medicines, taking blood pressures." If UES students could give 500 hours, she asked herself, "what could we do if this university decided to give back to its neighborhood?"⁸ That question, coupled with the need to devise a dramatic anniversary initiative, gave birth to Sacred Heart's 30,000 Hours project.

A thirtieth anniversary celebration with a cornerstone of community service excited Bertsch. But she wondered would everyone at the school buy into the project? Such a proposal, she knew from experience, demanded total institutional support at ground zero to possess even a chance at succeeding. The question was: "Could we pull this off?" So she called a meeting to "feel out" students, faculty, and staff. "It was a pitch, as far as I remember it," she said. "Here's a proposal: We could go to the President and say we could do this. So we asked the people at the meeting, do you think we can? People from Development were there, Student Government, students. . . . We got to the 30,000 purely because it was the thirtieth anniversary."⁹ At the meeting, Bertsch discovered overwhelming support for the project.

Assured of the backing of students, faculty, and staff, Bertsch then carried the "30,000 Hours" suggestion to the President saying, "Why don't we think of giving back to our neighborhood and thanking them for the support they have given us over these thirty years?"¹⁰ Cernera not only embraced the idea, at a subsequent meeting with students he delivered a challenge: he would log more volunteer hours than any student present, setting the stage for a most ambitious, if not risky (from a public relations point of view), community service effort. "When I look back at it," said Bertsch, "I think it was an enormous undertaking with no foundation, no structure."¹¹ In place at the time was an idea, but it was a powerful idea that the President did not plan to keep under wraps for long.

Announcing a Bold Initiative

At commencement that May, before announcing the 30,000 Hours project, Cernera reiterated one of his favorite themes on education: he exhorted the graduates to take from their years at Sacred Heart University "a deep sense of responsibility for the world and the next generation," reminding them that they lived in a "fragile world in great need of healing and of compassionate service," and that they carried a "responsibility for the well-being of the human family." Talking about the need for generosity, which set the stage for his surprise announcement, he said, "it is a deeply held conviction that the generous life is the one that is worth living. If you live by that conviction, the world will be a better place for your having passed through it."

Then the President, in one of the defining moments in the school's history of service and volunteerism, announced a bold initiative:

I am delighted to announce a University initiative of importance to us all. During the 1993-94 academic year, Sacred Heart University will celebrate its thirtieth anniversary. Inspired by the vision of Bishop Walter Curtis, we opened our doors for the first time with 143 students and 9 full-time faculty on September 11, 1963. For thirty years, we have sought to educate women and men so that they might be prepared to live in and make their contribution to the world.

In our planning for this year of celebration, the Thirtieth Anniversary Committee of faculty, staff, and students has recommended to me a bold initiative, one that will affirm one of the most deeply cherished values of this University, an initiative that I believe will be a beacon of hope to the people of our local and regional communities. We will commit ourselves as a university community—students, faculty, staff, alums—to thirty thousand hours of community service during the academic year that begins on July 1, 1993 and ends on June 30, 1994.

We envision members of the University community, both individually and collectively, engaged in many and varied forms of community service at the local, regional, national, and even international level. It will be one of our ways to celebrate our life as a university and to recommit ourselves to community service while we continue to grow as a dynamic and distinctive academic community. To our graduates, and to every member of the Sacred Heart family, I invite and encourage your participation.¹²

The announcement caught the assembled audience by surprise. Many found the idea exciting and took pride in the school's intention to give back to the community; others withheld judgment, suspecting the call for 30,000 hours of community service was an audacious, even foolhardy, public relations stunt that could backfire if the goal proved unreachable. But, in spite of what the naysayers thought, the service initiative made perfect sense. It fired the collective imagination of the University community, it reflected the school's revised mission statement which encouraged the preferential treatment for the poor, and it answered the questions posed by the El Salvador experience about involving students in volunteer work in Bridgeport. "'We're going to do the whole United Way thing with thermometer and everything,' said spokeswoman Ginny Apple after the ceremony referring to a sign often employed during United Way fund drives."¹³

With the challenge now a matter of public record, the question was how to make good on such a prodigious undertaking. Who would be in charge? Who were the key players? How would the University's resources be mobilized? What were those resources? Who could be expected to support the project, and how would they be brought "on line"? Just keeping track of the volunteer hours would be a massive headache. Who would do it? Obviously, serious planning was called for. "By the fall," said Bertsch, "the President wanted a plan for how we were going to do this."¹⁴ So did Bertsch and the other members of the anniversary committee.

A Project Coordinator is Named

The first task was to locate someone to take charge of day-to-day operations. The "Coordinator of Volunteerism," according to the job description, would

contact local agencies requiring the services of volunteers; secure opportunities for placement of SHU volunteers; publicize throughout the University opportunities for placement with volunteer agencies; arrange for initial contact of SHU volunteer and external agency; monitor participation of SHU administration, staff, faculty, students, and alumni; establish data base of agencies, needs, and SHU participants; cooperate with the offices of Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Alumni Affairs in promoting volunteerism at SHU; insure inclusion of current projects re: PEACE, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, Habitat, Mercy Learning Center, Literacy Volunteers, McKinney House, etc., in broader institutional approach and volunteerism.¹⁵

In other words, the school was searching for a miracle worker: someone who knew the Bridgeport area and its social service agencies, a person familiar with the institutional structure at the University, a point-person who could keep the larger picture firmly in mind while attending to the nitty-gritty details of logging day-to-day volunteer efforts, and lastly someone with heart who not only believed the goal was within reach but who would work tirelessly to achieve it. Fortunately a Sacred Heart Media Studies graduate, a person with a track record of volunteer efforts, and a media consultant with access to area organizations, was available. Her name was Gail Halapin.

Once the coordinator was in place, planning began in earnest. Immediately Bertsch requested key people on campus to attend a meeting to review the "progress to date on the 30,000 Hours project," and to meet Halapin.¹⁶ Also at this meeting, Bertsch introduced a student intern enrolled in an Independent Study writing course who would cover the 30,000 Hours project for the

Spectrum and outside press. A double major in English and Sociology, Sarah Gauthier agreed to author a series of articles on volunteers and service sites to maintain visibility for the project. Halapin reiterated this need to "keep a high-visibility profile in order to encourage and motivate participants," adding that another publication, the alumni newsletter, also would be "a great avenue for this purpose," saying it could "spotlight volunteers; become a vehicle to inform the alumni of this project; provide listings of where they can interact with this project"; and "provide a means of visual feedback to see the hours as they accumulate."¹⁷

Next on the list was the call for a catchy project theme song. Bertsch turned to Mike Campo, the University choir director, and sent him two brief selections from the school's mission statement as background materials for the lyrics. The first selection read: "Sacred Heart University aims to assist in the development of people . . . compassionate of heart, responsive to social and civic obligations, and able to respond to an ever-changing world." The second quote announced the University's "responsibility to share its resources and its special gifts and talents for the betterment of the human community," and ended with the key language of the document: "All members of the University community are encouraged strongly to participate in the wider community through service to others, especially the poor."¹⁸ Campo rose to the occasion, contributing a song that included several key ideas:

Thirty Thousand Hours

Thirty thousand hours, reaching out with a heart that
cares

For our friends in many places, joining them we will do
our share.

Lift up our world together with a pride in all we give.
We'll make our world a kinder place, then in peace and
joy we'll live.

A very special feeling comes to those who lend a hand.
Doesn't matter what you offer, you just offer what you
can.

For the gift of yourself is a gift that will last,

Compassion for others is all that we can ask.
 Thirty thousand hours, this promise we'll keep together.¹⁹

With a coordinator on board, a theme song in place, volunteer hours already trickling in, and the school year started, it was time for the September "kick-off" celebration.

The Service Fair Kick-Off

Although the 30,000 Hours drive began July 1, the Service Fair on September 14 on the patio outside the Dining Hall—complete with the singing of the newly-composed theme song, booths for a veritable "who's who" of local social service agencies,²⁰ and an inspirational talk by Cernera—marked the first pitch for the program to uncommitted undergraduates. Reporting on the day's festivities, the *Connecticut Post* said, "the idea for the '30,000-hour program' grew from a trip 10 faculty, students and administrators took to El Salvador to help in that troubled country's rebuilding effort." In the same article, reporter Cheryl Yost quoted Cernera as saying, "We're holding up a value that has been important to the university for a long time. . . . We think it's an integral part of the educational opportunity for our students." Then Cernera added, "What more appropriate time to 'Keep the Promise' we have made throughout the decades to share our resources and special gifts and talents for the betterment of the human community."²¹

At the Service Fair, Cernera and Bertsch, in a memorable photo-op, turned over a two-and-a-half foot hourglass with its sand symbolizing the volunteer hours needed to make good on the promise as well as the limited time frame to accomplish the feat. The *Spectrum* quoted Cernera as saying, "Thirty thousand hours of volunteer service is an ambitious task." Then the President challenged those present by saying, "I ask you to think of each grain of sand as representing a promise that I hope each person in the University community will pledge to keep during the year." Summing up, Halapin noted the fair "was to have students see first-hand organizations and agencies that need volunteers."²² Then, in what amounted to a direct plea to students, she said "No matter

what your interests and schedule, there is a need for your special gifts and talents."²³

A follow-up article in the same issue of the *Spectrum* announced that "service log cards will be available throughout the school for volunteers to write their names and log the number of hours." The article noted that Halapin "will take that information and run it through the computer system by service agency and by student. At the end, she will compile all this information and find out how many volunteers and how many hours were served." Referring to volunteer efforts promised and already logged, Halapin said, "the response from the faculty and staff has been great. Hopefully by the end of the year we'll come out with 30,000 hours," adding, "then we're going to throw a big party."²⁴

In fact, when the school year began, no one on campus knew if the 30,000-hour goal was attainable. Some believed it might be possible, and certainly they were willing to put forth their best efforts to make it happen, but with the President using the word "ambitious," and the coordinator of the project saying "hopefully," about the best spin the University community could place on "Keeping the Promise" was "cautious optimism." "One of my biggest concerns," recalled Halapin, "was that it was just going to peter out totally."²⁵ To cite an early example of what could happen, Cathy Swenson, the program assistant for activities on campus, had been asked to become a committee member of the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation Walk-A-Thon scheduled for Saturday, September 18. After accepting the position she sent a memo to department chairpersons asking for support. "As you know," she said in the memo, "at Commencement Ceremonies Dr. Cernera announced a commitment by the University of 30,000 hours towards community service projects. I am currently working with the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation and PepsiCo in recruiting Sacred Heart University to participate in this year's Walk-A-Thon. . . . The celebrity Grand Marshall will be John Ratzenberger, 1992 Honorary Alumni. . . . I believe this project is a wonderful way to incorporate the *Pioneer* vision of service while helping the future generations of tomorrow."²⁶ With "Cliff the Mailman" Ratzenberger, the school's famous celebrity committed to the

Walk-A-Thon, Swenson hoped that at least 500 participants would sign up, filling donated buses for the ride from the Fairfield campus to PepsiCo Headquarters in Purchase, New York. Instead, the University contingent logged a disappointing 13.5 hours that day.²⁷ So "Keeping the Promise" was not going to be easy.

Getting the Ball Rolling

On the other hand, the project did experience a "jump start" earlier in the summer when the second delegation to El Salvador tallied up 2,575 hours of service in that country and presented the total to Halapin. "The El Salvador trip got the ball rolling," recalled Bertsch, in a *Spectrum* feature article on sophomore Gloria Irizarry, who, along with her classmate Angela Donohue, had accompanied faculty and administrators on the trip.²⁸ "My arrival in El Salvador was the turning point in my life," Irizarry said in the article, adding that "Salvadorans possess a concept of wealth totally different from Americans. Their richness is in service and community."²⁹ This sense of "richness in service and community" that Irizarry alluded to began to be felt on campus as the anniversary year moved forward and more segments of the University community joined in the task of achieving the 30,000-hour goal, even though the success of the project was still in doubt.

Next, Halapin designed a 30,000-hour flyer to distribute on campus, and a Volunteer Services Log. "Learning occurs not only in the classroom," the flyer announced, "but also through a variety of volunteer experiences. These opportunities for service join students, faculty, staff, and alumni together in a commitment to justice. Depending on your interests, talents, and schedule, you can volunteer for one-day or for a semester-long project. You can choose from a variety of agencies or let us help you find something to meet your specific interest or concern. . . . There are many agencies where you can make a difference." Inside, under the heading "Keeping the Promise," the flyer listed several service possibilities, including elderly outreach, AIDS/HIV support project, tutoring children, homeless and hunger, Amnesty International, recreational for special needs children, Habitat for Humanity, and Big Brothers/Big Sisters.³⁰

Highlighting one of the above sites in her series of *Spectrum* articles, Gauthier called attention to a Habitat project located in one of the most neglected and drug-infested sections in Bridgeport. "The Pembroke Street home, a two-story four-bedroom wooden structure is now nearing completion," she wrote. "Under the direction of the construction manager Gary Koss, a Bridgeport resident and alumni of Sacred Heart University, the new home was built with special modifications for a mother in a wheel chair, her husband, and three young children." Shelley Donovan, a sophomore and a member of the campus organization PEACE, said, "I am very enthusiastic about working on this house and spending my free time working on community projects." Gauthier attributed Donovan's enthusiasm to "the growing excitement toward service events generated on campus this year." In the same article, Bertsch said, "Becoming involved in community service is part of what it means to be a member of the Sacred Heart community."³¹

Around the same time, the President underscored his commitment to the 30,000 Hours project when he wrote to Rutgers University Professor Catherine Stimpson, thanking her for her Women's Studies lecture on October 4. Saying her talk "was every bit as inspiring as I anticipated," Cernera pointed out "while there are many exciting things happening on our campus as we celebrate our thirtieth anniversary year, perhaps one of those closest to my heart is that of our 30,000 hours of community service. As we discussed that evening, the project is an innovative undertaking that encompasses all within our University family. As a teaching institution, Sacred Heart University strives to instill its students with a deeply rooted sense of civic and social responsibility. Thus, renewing our commitment to the community seemed particularly fitting." Then the President noted that "since the beginning of the academic year, 5,000 hours of service have been logged and several new service efforts are in the offing."³²

The President may not have had the University's first black-tie gala in a decade in mind when he mentioned to Stimpson the several service efforts on the immediate horizon, but the event—the Thirtieth Anniversary Dinner on campus—underscored the University's 30,000-hour commitment by honoring Helen

Wasserman, an indefatigable volunteer from Fairfield with a Discovery Award.³³ "Wasserman's volunteer efforts," reported an article in the *Fairfield Citizen-News*, "have touched many segments of society—women's causes, the homeless, business and industry, chambers of commerce, religious organizations and service and philanthropic groups."³⁴ Singling out the efforts of Wasserman sent a clear message: volunteerism and service to community ranked among the highest ideals espoused by the University.

Pledge Called "Amazing"

As the news of the school's 30,000-hour commitment spread, the off-campus response was immediate and strong. Nancy Mandell, from the Department of Higher Education for the State of Connecticut, reported in a memo that "Sacred Heart University has pledged 30,000 hours of community service to celebrate the university's thirtieth anniversary. Sr. Margaret Palliser and Gail Halapin from Sacred Heart talked about their program at the network meeting on October 13." Mandell endorsed the program, writing that "the creativity involved in their 30,000-hour pledge is amazing. Features of the program include service logs which can be mailed in by students, faculty, staff, and alumni (copy enclosed) to keep track of the hours, buttons worn by everyone on campus proclaiming their pledge, and a newly written song about the 30,000 hours which is sung before each football game and at other school events. These are only a few of the innovations described at the meeting."³⁵

With clubs and organizations on campus vying with one another for the prestige of logging the most volunteer hours, and with members of the University community searching for innovative ways to get more involved in the project, it was not long before some novel approaches to service surfaced. For example, how could a thirty-five-mile fall foliage bicycle trip (voted "the best autumn foliage trip by the *Fairfield County Weekly*") suddenly qualify as part of the 30,000-hour project? The tour organizers, Leland Roberts and myself had started the annual day trip fifteen years earlier for students, faculty, and staff, and after meeting with 30,000 hour coordinator Halapin it was decided that "this will be

the first time that hours will be logged and proceeds will go to the March of Dimes."³⁶

But the most satisfying project, recalled Halapin, was making quilts for AIDS patients. "I think it was the best project people worked on," said Halapin.³⁷ Started years earlier by Dr. Marian Calabrese, and then later dedicated to honoring the memory of Michael Arnold, a former adjunct faculty member and later the director of the Stamford Campus, the quilting took place after school, used donated materials, and involved the volunteer efforts of a half-a-dozen to a dozen students. "AIDS was something that people pretended didn't exist," recalled Calabrese. "The students and faculty needed to know that there was a need out there. It was a way that the students could touch and be touched by patients. And, of course, when you put a face on something, you're locked in forever." Over the years, said Calabrese recently, the students have made over 125 quilts of all sizes, from "baby quilts, to twin sizes, to doubles for couples."³⁸

As the academic year progressed, while the "Keeping the Promise" project started to gain more media visibility, the local press, to their credit, drew attention to the University's long-term commitment to social causes. "The concept of community service is not a new one to Sacred Heart University," reported the *Westport News*. "Throughout the years the university has been involved in various social service organizations, community partnerships, and other volunteer activities. Student organizations regularly devote a considerable amount of time to collect clothes for the homeless, provide food for the needy, and companionship for the elderly, to name a few of their outreach projects."³⁹ In the same article Cernera reiterated the notion that the current volunteer drive underscored a long tradition of service at the school.

One program on campus with an outstanding history of service that supported the 30,000-hour project was Campus Ministry. In a *Spectrum* article, Palliser, then the director of Campus Ministry, reminded readers that "one of the values of volunteerism is that you discover who you are and move into a greater level of responsibility and commitment to service." Campus Ministry specifically targeted the Merton House in Bridgeport (founded by Fr. Giuliani back in the 1970s), setting up

"volunteers to commit a designated time weekly to the program." Campus Ministry student President Diana Cutaia said, "It's like a job. If you say that you are going to be present on a shift, the Merton House schedules you and needs you to be there."⁴⁰

Then, as the volunteer hours piled up, the efforts of several people on campus were singled out for special mention. "High school teacher Wayne Sakal '84 does it because he wants to feel useful in an emergency," reported *Focus*, the University's publication for alumni and friends. "Associate Professor of Computer Science Frances Grodzinsky, Ph.D. does it to keep her hand in other interests. Angela Miccinello '79 does it to participate more fully in her children's education. Staff member Julia Pavia did it because somebody asked her . . . and it was something she likes to do anyway. Senior psychology majors Peter Rosaspina of Greenwich and Susan Ratanavong of Bridgeport not only do it as a head start on a career, but also because they want to give something back to the community."⁴¹ Another article in the same issue of *Focus* announced that "Coordinator of Volunteer Services Gail Halapin is pleased to report that she has recorded an amazing 23,650 hours through December, according to log cards received by Jan. 10."⁴² Many of those hours, it should be noted, were logged by people off campus. "Alumni and Stamford branch students have helped a great deal," explained Halapin.⁴³

By March 1, *The Catholic Transcript* announced the hours accrued by volunteers topped 27,000, predicting that the University "will easily exceed its 30,000-hour goal by the end of the school year."⁴⁴ In the same article, several volunteers talked about their service efforts. "I've been volunteering for years," said Rachel Harrison, who led youth retreats in her parish and worked in an area soup kitchen. Rosaspina volunteered at the Stamford Children's Guidance Center and the Greenwich Youth Shelter. "At first I volunteered because I wanted the learning experience, but now it is much more than that," Rosaspina said. "It's a reciprocal, give and take thing." Also cited was Dr. Laurence Weinstein, a professor of management at Sacred Heart, for working with the Branford chapter of Big Brothers/Big Sisters. "I guess I volunteer because, like many others, I feel I've been lucky in life, and I want to give something back," said Weinstein, who

attributed the urge to volunteer to his Jewish background and the concept of doing good works. The article pointed out that Weinstein "also visits terminally ill patients and helps organize workshops for a once-a-year, week-long Jewish/Christian interfaith retreat. In total, he volunteers about ten hours a week."⁴⁵

In a related issue, while the school was gearing up to celebrate reaching its volunteer goal, a group of faculty from the University of El Salvador visited our campus during the first week in March. The faculty, made up of members from Medicine and Allied Health, were on campus to "receive training in team building and strategic planning."⁴⁶ The visit, in the words of one SHU administrator, allowed us to publicly acknowledge our debt to the people of El Salvador and, in particular, to their university's social outreach program. "I remember a very public meeting with the faculty who came from the University of El Salvador," said Bertsch. "We told them the story of the 30,000 hours, and we thanked them for the gift they had given us to see our neighbor in a new way."⁴⁷

Reaching the Goal

At the Founder's Day celebration held on March 24 in Schine Auditorium, President Cernera made a much-anticipated announcement. "One of my happy tasks this morning is to tell you that we have reached 32,010 hours of community service," he said. "This is wonderful testimony to the kind of University we are trying to become." Halapin, according to an article in the local press, "was ecstatic when she learned the goal had been surpassed with more than three months remaining in the campaign. 'I've double-checked the accuracy of the figures in my computer just to be certain. This is marvelous,' Halapin said. 'I hope we can go to the next milestone—40,000 hours—before the year ends.'"⁴⁸ The *Connecticut Post* couched the achievement in these terms: "Put them together, and members of the Sacred Heart University community have logged 33,381 hours of community service since last May. That's 1,390 days. More than 3½ years."⁴⁹

Reaching the goal was especially satisfying because the entire University community had participated in the project. "I didn't

realize so many people would want to volunteer," said Halapin. "It wasn't just the students. It was the faculty, the staff. It was everybody."⁵⁰ To cite one example, the athletic teams had banded together, joined in the volunteer campaign, and, much to their credit, logged thousands of hours for the cause. "What really pleases me," said Don Cook, director of athletics, "is that so many of our student-athletes, at first hesitant to become involved, have gotten so much into the spirit that they're donating hours now purely because they want to, not because there's any goal to reach." Cook went on to say that "athletes are usually so focused on playing their sport that they don't see anything else going on in the world. But our kids got the opportunity to see beyond the world of athletics and sports and they learned they could make a difference in other very important ways."⁵¹

Once the 30,000-hour goal had been exceeded, the commendations poured in. The woman's softball team, nominated for a Connecticut Higher Education Community Service Award in recognition of its volunteer work with the Jewish Home for the Elderly, was presented a citation honoring its efforts at the annual awards ceremony in Hartford. "The Higher Education Community Service Awards were created," said Andrew G. De Rocco, commissioner of Higher Education, "to honor . . . outstanding leadership and to acknowledge the selfless contributions you make to your communities."⁵² At those same ceremonies at the State Capitol, the "Sacred Heart University 30,000 Hours Program" also was singled out for a Higher Education Community Service Award for achieving its goal.⁵³

In fact, the number of hours logged in the campaign by the time the year ended June 30, 1994, surpassed 37,000. But along with the joy and celebration that marked the close of a successful campaign, came a vexing question: What next?⁵⁴ How could the school follow up the Thirtieth Anniversary campaign? Since opening its doors to students in 1963, volunteering and community service had been at the core of the University's mission, but with its Thirtieth Anniversary celebration now a part of its history, what was the next step? "We're very, very proud of all our students," said Bertsch. "They really responded to a need and showed they could make a big difference in so many diverse areas

of the community." Then Bertsch alluded to the issue at hand: "What we want to do now is build on this wonderful effort and help carry it into the future in a number of meaningful ways. We would like to see this kind of school-wide spirit and dedication continue beyond our thirtieth anniversary."⁵⁵

The Challenge Ahead

Perhaps more so at this time than any other, the challenge posed by combining community service with the ongoing education of students weighed on the minds of administrators and faculty. There had to be a way to keep the proverbial ball rolling, to build support for a continuing institutional-wide commitment to community service, especially since the 30,000-hour project had proven once again that service created real learning experiences for the volunteers outside the classroom. In fact, efforts to continue the school's commitment to institutionalize service, particularly through a new program gaining national attention called service-learning, already had started earlier in the spring semester.

ANSWERING THE CALL

A Photographic View



1. Bishop Curtis signs the University charter with Governor Dempsey looking on.



2. The first faculty. *Seated:* John Croffy, Maurice O'Sullivan, Marcella Malloy, William Conley, Maureen Lynch, John Polinsky, William Kilbourne. *Standing:* William Ready, Richard Matzek, Alan Reinerman, Lawrence Skane, Anthony Pinciario.

3. Dr. Herbert Clish presents first self-evaluation report to Dr. William H. Conley (*on left*).



4. Donations pile up for Appalachia Drive.



5. Bill Dean presents the official school seal to Bishop Curtis, Charter Night, 1963, with Dr. Conley on the left.

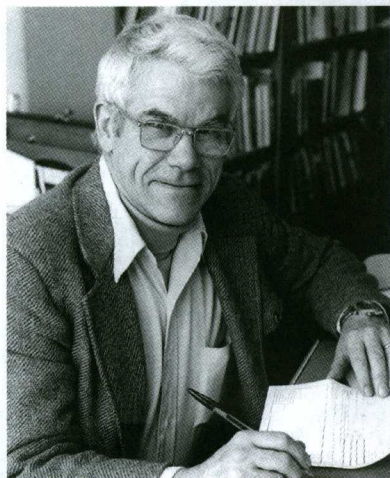


6. The Recreation for the Physically Handicapped After School (REPHAS) volunteers and their friends.



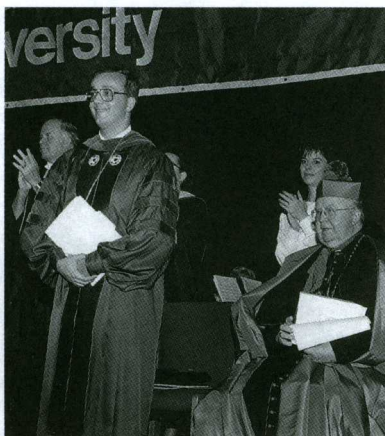
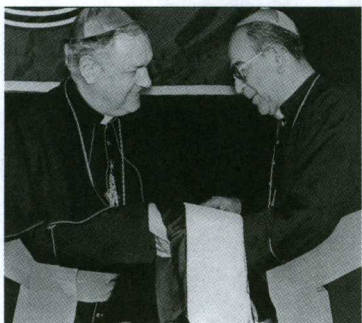
7. Fr. John Giuliani celebrates Mass at the 20th Anniversary of the Merton House.

8. *Right:* Felipe Reinoso receives 1999 President's Service Award.

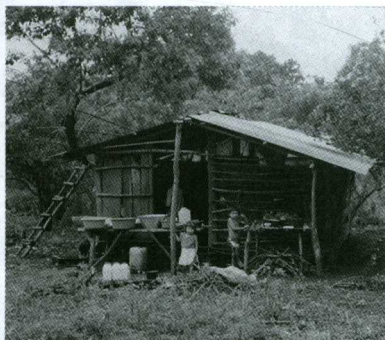


9. *Left:* Joseph Grau, director of the Romero lecture series.

10. Inauguration of Anthony J. Cernera as Sacred Heart University's fifth president, with Bishop Curtis.



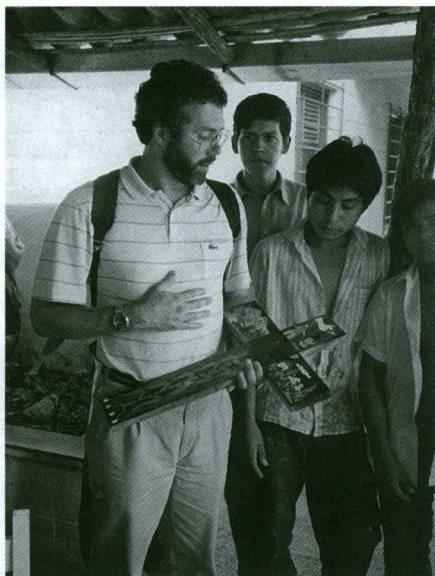
11. Archbishop Arturo Rivera Damas awarded degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, May 17, 1990. Most Rev. Edward M. Egan bestows academic hood.



12. *Right:* Typical home in the Salvadoran countryside.



13. First delegation visiting University of El Salvador, June 1992. *Left to right:* Gerald Reid, Lauren Kempton, José Ventura, UES vice-rector Catalina Machuca, María Teresa Torreira, Thomas Trebon, Louise Spence, Charlotte Gradie. *Back row:* Anne Barker, Dom Sacco, Scott Willison, Ralph Corrigan, Eilene Bertsch, UES guide.



14. Gerald Reid accepts the Salvadoran cross, a gift to the University from members of the *carpinteria* at Calle Real, El Salvador.



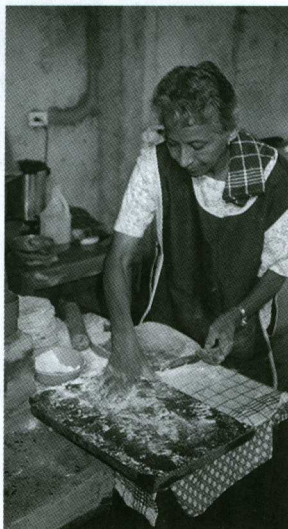
15. Sacred Heart University delegation touring the University of El Salvador with war-damaged building in background. *Front left:* Gerald Reid, Thomas Trebon, José Ventura, Louise Spence, UES guide.



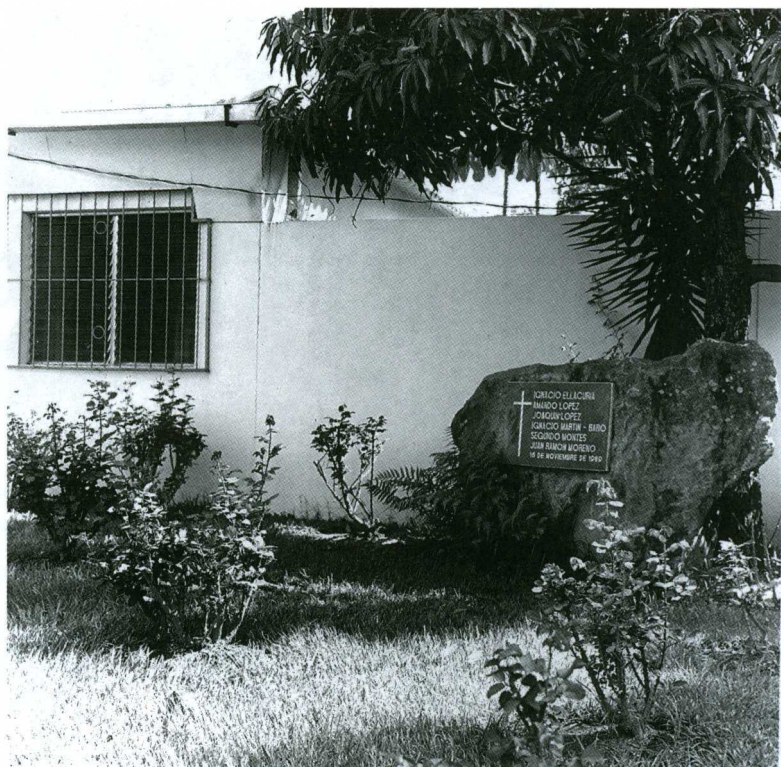
16. Fr. Dave Blanchard makes a point during stories told by repatriated Salvadorans in Calle Real. *From left:* Fr. Blanchard, Juana and her two children, unidentified child, Ralph Corrigan.



17. *Above:* The site of the sixth grade class at Nueva Esperanza, El Salvador.



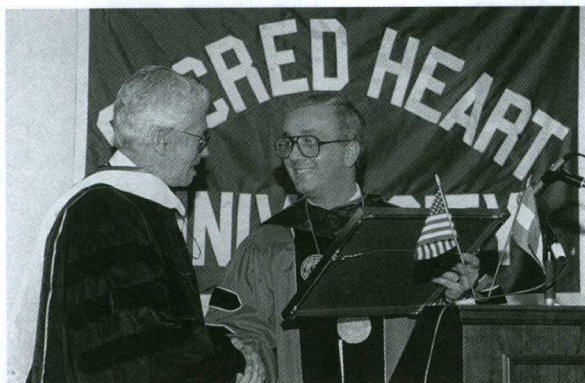
18. *Right:* Sr. Elena prepares a group meal for a Sacred Heart University delegation at Tierra Blanca.



19. The rose garden commemorating the slain Jesuits at the University of Central America.



20. Fr. Dean Brackley speaks on the UCA campus about the “broken heart” experience. *From left:* Robin McAllister, Katherine Kidd, Fr. Brackley.



21. President Cerna bestows honorary doctorate on UES rector Fabio Castillo Figueroa on March 8, 1993.



22. FMLN guerrillas encountered by the first delegation to El Salvador in 1992. *Left background:* Charlotte Gradie, Minor Sinclair, Scott Willison, Lauren Kempton.



23. Fr. Blanchard lectures on El Salvador on the Sacred Heart University campus. *From left:* César Muñoz, Fr. Blanchard, Melissa Tristine, Gerald Reid.

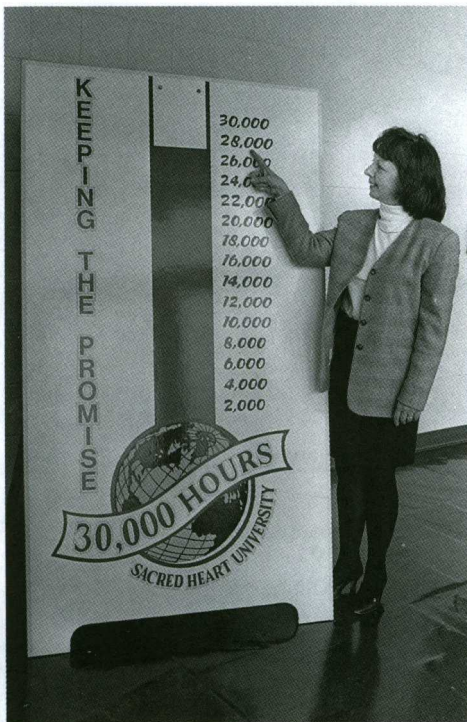


24. Make a Difference Day, November 14, 1992. *From left:* Alice Chaves and two friends.



25. Dr. Cernera and Eilene Bertsch turn hourglass at 30,000 Hours kick-off.

26. Gail Halapin points to the next plateau for 30,000 Hours project.



27. Connecticut Higher Education Community Service Awards ceremony, April 14, 1994. *Seated:* Michael Arnold. *Standing from left:* Don Cook, Peter Rosaspina, George Reiss, Anthony J. Cerna.



28. Big Brothers/Big Sisters Halloween Party in Hawley Lounge on the University campus, October 30, 1994.



29. *Above:* Shawn Avery hands out books during a Community Connections work-week in Bridgeport.



30. *Right:* Lourdes González carries box during Community Connections.



31. Students building Sandcastle Playground at Jennings Beach in Fairfield.

32. *Below:* Cima Sedigh and Robin McAllister on Operation Bridgeport weekend.



33. Fr. Mike and Eilene Bertsch stock shelves at St. Charles in Bridgeport.



34. Charlotte Gradie and friends sort St. Charles CCD registrations.



35. Habitat crew. *From left:* Anne Marie Fleissner, Marian Calabrese, Paul Madonna, Mike Weild. *Rear:* Larry Wielk

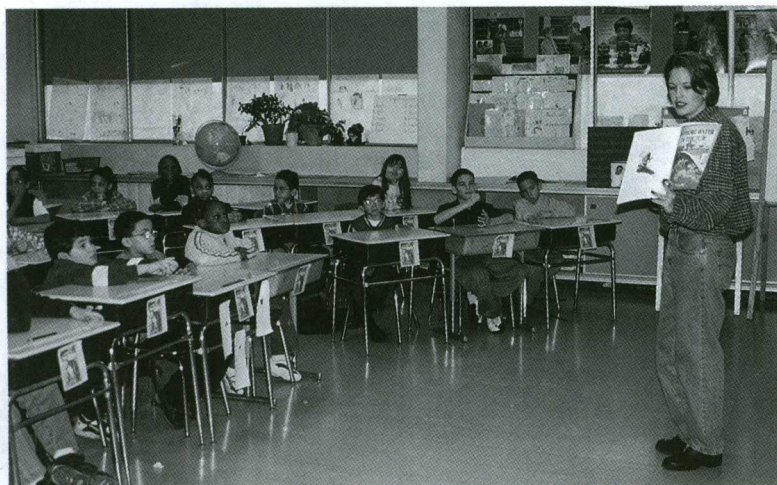


36. Darlene Harris at Sandtown in Baltimore.

37. Sr. Margaret and Phyllis Machledt share a pensive moment at St. Charles Urban Center in Bridgeport.



38. Service-learning honors class at Svihra Park clean-up with 7th graders from Read School.



39. Cindy McQueen at Winthrop School "Read Aloud."



40. Hockey team members lend a hand at Habitat site in Bridgeport.



41. Listening to students' stories during Operation Bridgeport weekend.
From left: Eilene Bertsch, Kathy LaFontana, Laurie Bellico, Patricia Harris, Althea Green, Gerald Hibbert.



42. Carol Batt helps friend with clean-up at Luis Muñoz Marín School.



43. Sean Otterspoor, Jane Gangi, Robin McAllister, Fr. Gustavo Falla and other volunteers work on Shelton St. House.



44. Students send "stitches from the heart" at AIDS quilting project.



45. Community Connections 1998.



46. *Left:* Gerald Reid helps with furniture collection at St. Charles.



47. Connecticut Higher Education Awards ceremony with Eilene Bertsch, Jack de Graffenried, Donna Dodge, and student winners.



48. Matt Flood, Mark Ungeheuer, Sean Otterspoor at Sandtown Habitat site in Baltimore.



49. A service-learning Global Connections presentation at Tashua School in Trumbull.



50. Students, faculty, and staff at Habitat Women Build site.

51. Sr. Donna Dodge
at Habitat site with
members of women's
basketball team.



52. Dedication ceremony at Habitat's Shelton St. house.

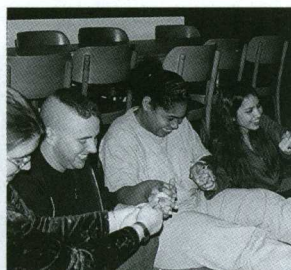


53. Michael Emery at a "Read Aloud" session.

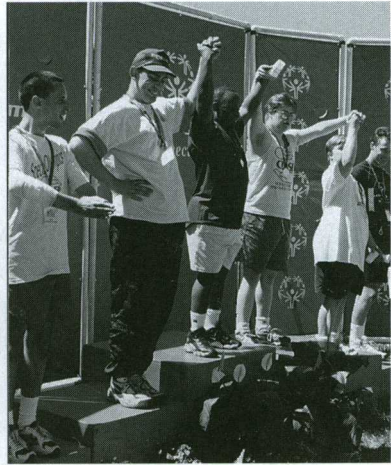
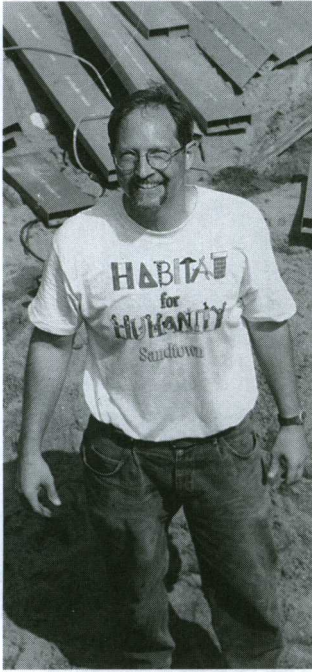


54. Sean Otterspoor and Angela Bowden on a break at the Habitat site in the Philippines.

55. CURTIS Week participants play "losing your marbles."



56. Reception at Sacred Heart University honoring Millard Fuller, founder of Habitat. *Front from left:* Patricia Kurowski, Ann-Marie D'Amore, Shawn Avery, Laurie Nagy. *Rear:* Phyllis Machledt, Sean Otterspoor, Millard Fuller, Angela Bowden, John Roney.



57. *Above:* Participants in 1999 Special Olympics on the University campus.

58. *Left:* John Roney at Habitat site.



59. Jack de Graffenried's summer art workshop.



60. First student delegation to El Salvador at Sr. Elena's parish church in 1996.



61. *Above:* Lauren Kempton and Brooks Parmelee in Sr. Elena's kitchen.

62. *Left:* Fr. Pedro, Sr. Elena, María Teresa Torreira, at Tierra Blanca, El Salvador.



63. Students helping out at the salt works in El Salvador.

64. Leveling the basketball court in El Salvador.

Front: Ed Murray.

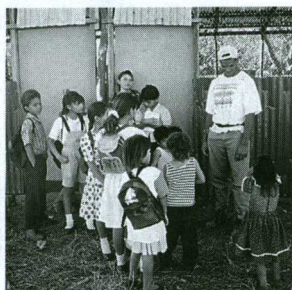
From left: Henry Parkinson, Brian Merwin, Liz Lento, Michelle Day, Christine Maursky.



65. *Left:* The backboard goes up.



66. *Below:* Henry Rondon meets with school children at San Hilario.

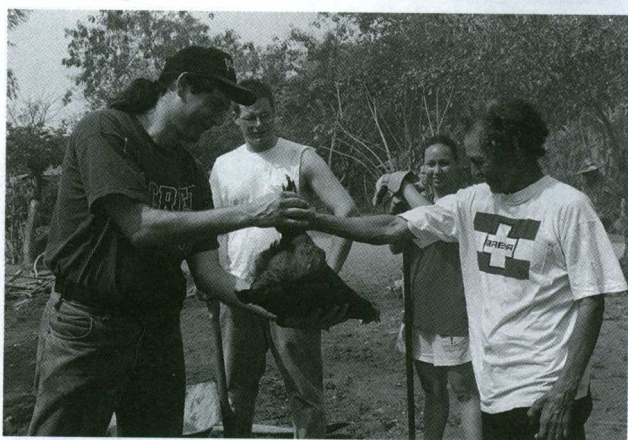


67. Part of the 2000 women's work crew in San Hilario, El Salvador. *From left:* Melissa Hensley, Rachel Neu, Beth Berard, Liz Lento, Julia Torpey, Heather Heath, and Sr. Elena.



68. Chapel in El Salvador where Archbishop Romero was assassinated.

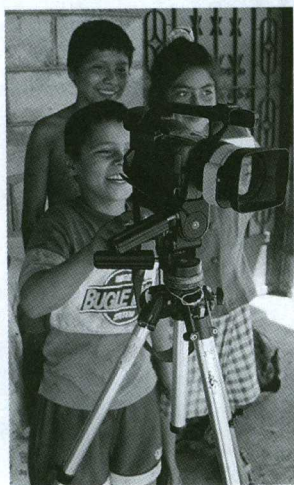
69. *Right:* María Teresa Torreira and students visit the rose garden that commemorates the slain Jesuits on UCA campus in San Salvador.



70. Terry Neu accepts the gift of the red hen at Los Ensayos in El Salvador



71. *Above:* Earthquake rubble in El Salvador, February 2001.



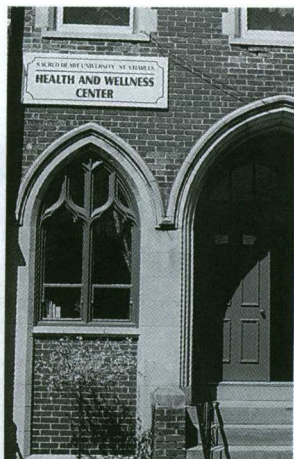
72. *Left:* Children play with video camera used to record earthquake damage in Tierra Blanca.

73. *Below:* Delegation sent to record earthquake damage. *From left:* César Muñoz, Robin McAllister, Lauren Kempton, Brooks Parmelee, Terry Neu.





74. The dedication ceremony at the Health and Wellness Center, St. Charles Parish in Bridgeport.



75. View outside office of Health and Wellness Center.



76. *Left:* Michael Emery and Linda Strong look on during the dedication ceremony.



77. Sr. Elena addressing the graduates at the 2001 Sacred Heart University commencement exercises after receiving honorary doctorate. *Left:* Robin McAllister and Terry Neu.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Grant and Its Impact

Early in the spring 1994 semester, working behind the scenes while the campaign to attain the 30,000 hours was still on everyone's mind, administrators began planning for the next stage in the evolution of "service" on campus. In January, Dr. Trebon, Eilene Bertsch, and Sr. Margaret Palliser, with the assistance of Dr. Virginia Harris, the director of grants, forwarded a proposal to the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) seeking "participation in the CIC Alliance in order to improve existing campus efforts to inculcate a spirit of service and to consider ways in which to incorporate service-learning activities" into the curriculum. The grant abstract noted that the University proposed "to undertake a campus-wide examination of key service-learning issues that are critical to the development of institutional consensus on service-learning and the appropriate next steps."¹

The proposal called attention to the University's proud record of service activities, but pointed out that "these have been individual or unit efforts aimed at inculcating a spirit of service on our campus, rather than a collaboration of the whole campus community in an understanding of the importance of service-learning to the mission of the University." The authors noted that the school needed "to consider ways to incorporate service-learning activities both in the general educational curriculum and in several disciplinary areas."² That meant coming up with a "definition of Sacred Heart University's role in integrating

learning and service" that blended "reflection, intellectual inquiry and analysis, and the development of citizenship and leadership." To accomplish these goals the University proposed to appoint a task force in February 1994, "with constituents from the student body, faculty, staff, and local community service organizations," and to hold three campus-wide forums, bringing "recognized experts in service-learning to the campus to provide their perspectives on key issues, and to guide our institution's self-examination of service-learning issues."³ Finally, the authors of the proposal wrote, "although Sacred Heart University is at an early stage in its efforts to use service to enhance learning and to foster a spirit of service, the University is committed to moving to a new plateau. Service-learning is a part of our mission and the University community has been actively seeking appropriate methods for institutionalizing an ethic of service and principled action directed at societal needs."⁴

To support the proposal, Cernera forwarded a letter to Dr. Allen Splete, the president of the Council of Independent Colleges. "A commitment to caring for and sharing with the community our wealth of resources," he wrote, "is the foundation upon which Sacred Heart University was founded thirty years ago, and is the mission by which I am proud to lead the University today."⁵ Additional support came from Trebon, who also wrote to Splete, noting that he had "served as one of those involved in the first El Salvador experience." Trebon said, "I can speak from this personal experience of the transforming character of the project on my own perspectives and behaviors as well as the interaction among those who participated and their colleagues on their return to campus." Trebon went on to say that the grant, if funded, would allow the school to "become a better and more informed community."⁶ On April 1, 1994, a CIC news release named Sacred Heart University as one of thirty institutions out of 155 applicants to receive a \$22,000 grant.⁷

Before winning the CIC grant, and aware of the school's desire to continue its institutional commitment to service and specifically its need to investigate ways to incorporate service into the academic curriculum, Bertsch traveled to Washington, D.C., in February to attend the eleventh Annual International Conference on service-learning called "Education for Real,"

sponsored by The Partnership For Service-Learning. The conference promised to consider the following: how to connect "academic study and volunteer service; how to design service-learning courses and then create a coherent curriculum from those courses; and, finally, various ways of determining if the education has, in fact, been 'for real.'"⁸ The program booklet noted that "the interest in volunteer service in, for, and with the community has continued to increase each year. Thousands of college and university undergraduate and graduate students, joined by faculty and other professionals, are giving time, intelligence, enthusiasm and skill to address human needs. And in return, through their service they have learned about the world, about similarities and differences, the nature of community, value and about themselves and their capacity to learn."⁹

Granted, service-learning was an appealing, up-and-coming pedagogical enterprise gaining enthusiastic support across the country, but Bertsch arrived at the conference looking for answers to several questions. Did it make sense, for example, to follow the practice of Salvadoran universities and demand community service for graduation? And how could the Sacred Heart University faculty be persuaded to embrace service-learning? Would it affect faculty development negatively by sidetracking research and publication for tenure and promotion? What about the constraints on a faculty member's time, not to mention the issue of faculty autonomy in the classroom? Would the instructor's authority be jeopardized by knowledgeable on-site supervisors, or by students who after working "in the field" challenged basic concepts underpinning the courses?

Service-Learning: A Coherent, Values-Oriented Approach

As the conference presentations unfolded, it became clear to Bertsch that service-learning, although not readily answering all the above questions, nevertheless engaged students and faculty in new ways, while at the same time benefiting the community. Here was a coherent, values-oriented, experientially-based approach to education that, when delivered with conviction and expertise, could change students' perspectives on society (particularly

society's economically less fortunate members), on the role played by the individual in that society (hence the rallying cry "you can make a difference"), and at the same time provide an antidote to the "consumer mentality" of many students and their prevalent "what's in it for me" attitudes.

In *A Guide for Change*, a sourcebook for student writers, authors Ann Watters and Marjorie Ford list the following benefits of service-learning courses:

As students become involved in their communities, they become active rather than passive learners. While helping to identify and solve problems in their communities, they are building closer connections between their campus and their communities. Service-learning experiences provide unique opportunities to learn about our increasingly varied and changing world, to understand people and cultures that are unique, and to develop resourcefulness, a strong inner self, a clearer sense of personal identity. More than any other type of educational activity, working with others from a different culture or economic class can help you to begin to think critically about what you have, what other individuals in your community have a right to expect, and how you can contribute to your community.¹⁰

Under the guidance of the faculty member and a carefully selected on-site supervisor, the student experiences the reality of an after-school program, a soup kitchen, an adult literacy program, or other service-learning environment, then returns to the classroom and engages the instructor and other students in real-life issues, and then reflects on the meaning of those experiences. "Service-learning," I wrote in an essay, "is all about 'taking a plunge'—about making a commitment, then moving our students to a different place. It affords students the opportunity to rethink issues, to grow and mature, to be of service to others, to develop a sense of their self-worth, and to take pride in their efforts. It is education at its best."¹¹

Not only did Bertsch find the pedagogy making sense, she recognized that it tied directly into the mission statement of the University. But the question of how to sell the idea to the faculty

still proved troubling. Timing was crucial. While the spirit and excitement engendered by the 30,000 Hours project permeated the campus, the moment was right for introducing a new, ambitious undertaking. The announcement in April that Sacred Heart University was awarded a CIC grant jump-started the process.

A Service-Learning Informational Meeting

With the fall 1994 semester targeted for introducing service-learning on campus—which meant identifying faculty to teach, rethinking course contents, and rewriting syllabi—it was decided to wait until after graduation before holding an informational meeting. On June 14 a carefully worded letter from Bertsch and Palliser asked a “select group” of faculty who “had exhibited some substantial support for the El Salvador/30,000 Hours initiatives” to attend a June 21 meeting to enter into a dialogue on service-learning. “We wanted the meeting to resemble a forum/workshop for 25-30 people,” Bertsch recalled.¹² The letter read:

Dear Colleagues,

The formal celebration of Sacred Heart University’s 30th anniversary is coming to a close, and with it the conclusion of the 30,000 Hours project.

Wishing to build on the most positive aspect of the project—service to others—and develop its relationship to the academic center of the institution, the University applied for and was awarded a grant from the Council of Independent Colleges. The grant gives us the opportunity to think about the relationship between learning and service. Moreover, it provides limited funds for faculty to experiment with, reflect upon, and design ways in which service-learning projects can be incorporated into the syllabi of credit courses.

The Council of Independent Colleges does not advocate any one approach or outcome. It invites us to examine our mission, hold firm to our academic standards, and consider an additional mode of instruction and learning . . . specifically, service-learning.

To begin the dialogue at Sacred Heart University, Dr. Cernera and Dr. Trebon will host a working luncheon on Tuesday, June 21st from 12 noon until 2:00 P.M. in the Community Room at the Campus Center. In preparation for that luncheon, we request that you read the enclosed chapter from Robert N. Bellah's *The Good Society*.

Lunch will begin promptly at noon. At 12:30, there will be a panel discussion of some of the broader issues raised in the reading, and their relationship to the development of a service-learning component in the curriculum. By 1:15, the floor should be open to general discussion.

There is one hoped-for outcome from this initial meeting: we hope that from 4 to 6 faculty members will offer to serve as a pilot group for this project. Each participant will be requested to think through the syllabus of one course scheduled to be offered in the fall; to design and introduce a service-learning component into the syllabus of that course; and to observe and document their own responses and that of their students to the revised curriculum. Should the faculty member and students judge the learning experience to be academically sound, we will ask that the modified syllabus be shared with other faculty within one's own department and within the University at large.

Planning beyond that point needs to be discussed and formulated from within. For those who are willing to serve in the pilot group, a stipend of \$500 will be made available immediately, to be used at the faculty member's discretion in the cause of modifying the syllabus.

We are eager to meet with you on the 21st, and to participate in a dialogue that could have significant consequences for what our students learn and are able to do.¹³

In a move calculated to signal the extent of the University's commitment to service-learning, both the President and the Academic Vice-President hosted the event, a point that clearly

registered in the minds of the attending faculty. To further mark administrative support for the program, the Assistant Academic Vice-President and the Vice-President for Mission and Planning made a pitch at the meeting: Bertsch introducing the CIC project and its service-learning component; and Dodge, along with Reid, offering reflections under the heading "Education: Technical and Moral."

Alluding to the meeting in a later talk to a journalism class, Bertsch remembered saying to the faculty, "Look, we're going to put something on the table. Who is willing to take a risk to redesign a curriculum, a course, a way of teaching, a way of thinking, to bring the community in to what is a very tight dyad?" Opening up the dyad, she said "You bring in a third partner, a community who defines for you what it needs, and then you work your curriculum and your teaching relationship to make it a partnership." Then she asked, "Who would be willing to take that risk?"¹⁴ Later Bertsch said of the meeting that "the whole thing was geared to open it up, let everyone know what the project was about, and then ask for volunteers to jump on board." She added, "We needed to see who would be willing to take that chance because we knew it meant changing what people did, the way in which they did it, and with whom they did it."¹⁵

To conclude the meeting, Palliser handed out a document entitled "Tasks of the Service-Learning Task Force, 1994-95," charging that group to "review the available literature on service-learning and learn from experts in the field" and to share the information with the University community.¹⁶ Specifically, the task force was to seek answers to the following questions:

How can community service and work activities be integrated with or linked to the academic program at the University? How do service experiences relate to the institution's mission? How can our faculty be encouraged to embrace a spirit of service as an important purpose of education? In what ways can experiences that provide service be linked with course content? How can guidelines be developed for faculty who want to integrate community service into their courses? How can the work of

faculty in the area of service-learning be recognized in the evaluation of applications for promotion and tenure? When is academic credit for service appropriate? How can broad-gauged programs on leadership or ethics and values provide opportunities to reflect on service in volunteer and work experiences? In what ways do service experiences enhance the academic process?¹⁷

The document handed out at the meeting also stipulated that two campus-wide forums would be held—in the fall of 1994 and the spring of 1995—to serve as “follow up focus sessions involving faculty, students, and staff to examine further the issues raised at these forums.” Lastly, the document charged the task force to “produce a campus census report on the questions which will include a discussion of recommended steps.” This report, “the document concluded, “will serve as a guideline for linking community service, teaching, and research on campus, and will provide specific recommendations for institutionalizing service-learning activities into our curriculum and co-curricular activities.”¹⁸

The response to the June 21 meeting was gratifying. With some anxiety, and little background in service-learning, five faculty (Claire Marrone, Marian Calabrese, Nicole Cauvin, John Roney, and Lauren Kempton) signed on to try their hands at something different in the fall. In Marrone’s “Women’s Autobiography” course, for example, students interviewed “women from different cultures and backgrounds.” In a memo to Bertsch, Marrone explained that “each student shall choose one woman and interview her about her life. Students should select someone who, in their estimation, has not had the opportunity to express her life in any formal fashion and who would benefit from doing so, or someone who has undergone an experience from which others could learn.”¹⁹ In a Medieval History course, to cite another innovative project, Roney offered his students an optional service-learning component working “with a local sixth grade class doing a medieval history unit. They did presentations on knights, peasants, women, etc.”²⁰ Featured in a *Spectrum* profile that lauded his many efforts on and off campus, Roney said, “I try to help

students see the discovery in education.”²¹ In Calabrese’s popular Oral Interpretation of Literature course students worked in teams in a nearby after-school program producing a talent show and teaching drama, reading, and poetry. The Social Psychology course, taught by Cauvin, saw students placed in agencies and schools analyzing group interactions. And in Kempton’s Multi-Cultural Education course, students worked as a group with Habitat for Humanity.

A Coordinator Comes Aboard

After the start of the fall semester, the University, with financial backing from the CIC grant, hired as its new Coordinator of Service-Learning a former high school teacher, American Field Service advisor, community grassroots activist, and past president of the Bridgeport Chapter of Habitat for Humanity. Phyllis Machledt, with extensive experience in the community, immediately added new meaning, energy, and commitment to the notion of service at the University. “All my life I’ve believed in hands-on learning,” she said, recalling her interview for the position. “The whole concept of service-learning is something that I deeply believed in as a form of pedagogy,” she added. “I liked the fact that the University had been to El Salvador. I think people had had their eyes opened in El Salvador, but I kept hearing, ‘but we have to work in our own backyard.’ So that interested me.”²²

When Machledt came aboard in mid-September, some of the first service-learning offerings already had started and, as to be expected with the launching of a new program, she discovered courses with their share of strengths and weaknesses. “It was a little difficult,” Machledt recalled, “because some of them had already decided on what they were going to do.” And, she added, “at least in my mind some of their projects were going to be very difficult to do in the light of the community.”²³

But in spite of a few early misgivings, the first semester of service-learning courses on campus proved successful. In a March 1995 report on service-learning, Machledt wrote:

In written evaluations from the first semester courses, most students indicated that SL [service-learning] made the

course more interesting and would recommend it to someone else. A student in "Woman's Autobiography" said of her SL experience interviewing a formerly homeless woman that it "helped me begin to analyze myself and my life's triumphs and failures." A student who had previously volunteered a lot in her hometown wrote "By having to think and write about the observation, I learned more than just going (to the homeless shelter)." Clearly students who had a short SL project (one 6-hour interactive observation) were less affected by the experience than those who were in long term or weekly SL programs. The logistics of SL programs, such as finding a time for a group to meet or not having an agency return a call, caused some frustrations. However, the feedback so far has been overwhelmingly positive. Students said, "I learn best with 'hands-on' experiences combined with research," and "I applied things that I learned in class to the real world." Another said that it reduced her fear of what a homeless shelter was like. Several of the students in the weekly program signed up for SL courses second semester or continued to volunteer in the program.²⁴

Commenting on "attitude" in her report, Machledt wrote, "There does seem to be new interest and commitment in community service at SHU. . . . Many of the staff and faculty members continue to be excellent role models, volunteering hours of their time to worthy projects. Service-Learning has led more of the *students* to get involved in the local community and understand firsthand some of the problems. It has empowered them to do something about those problems. They also seem to see more relevance in their course material. The Service-Learning Program at Sacred Heart has made a difference!"²⁵

The Task Force Tackles the Issues

While the initial service-learning courses attracted their share of attention from the administration and faculty—because they

represented an investment of time and energy, and because they were thought to be the forerunners of a new mode of instructional delivery more directly related to the school's mission statement—a task force began in earnest to contend with several issues. According to Machledt's March 1995 report, the group had met six times since June of the previous year, tackling such topics as "a definition of service-learning, goals and guidelines for SL projects, evaluations of current courses and programs, how best to integrate SL with necessary course content, how to evaluate the SL component," and finally, "the question of liability in SL projects."²⁶

That same task force, now called the "Service-Learning Steering Committee," published the following set of guidelines governing student involvement in SL programs:

1. Wherever possible, students should have direct interaction with clients in the SL program.
2. Every reasonable precaution should be taken to place the students in secure programs with good, effective community leadership. Orientations should stress safety measures and strategies appropriate to the SL project.
3. Ideally, SL projects should expose students to contemporary issues facing American citizens, such as health, housing, the environment, education, immigration, crime, diversity, economic development, etc.
4. SL projects should emphasize student leadership and cooperation as much as possible, especially in areas of commitment and responsibility. Team or group projects should be encouraged where feasible.
5. SL projects should introduce students to possible career options.
6. SL placements should take in account student talents and interests.²⁷

At the same time, while the steering committee worked on developing service-learning guidelines, Machledt set up a series of informational workshops. In October, community group

representatives were invited to share their perspectives on the program, and at a January meeting representatives from Alpha Home, Habitat for Humanity, Mercy Learning Center, and Youth Rebuild "talked about the economic and social situations of their clients, 'realistic expectations, and sensible safety strategies.'"²⁸ As an outgrowth of the site representatives' ideas, people from three agencies (the Bridgeport School System, Alpha Home, and Mercy Learning Center) were invited to join the committee because, as Machledt noted in her report, "It is crucial that the community agencies be asked to define their own needs and not just be reacting to the academic needs of the university." Machledt further pointed out, "The members have also helped make the faculty aware of the necessary 'trivia,' such as differences in school calendars, problems of transportation, and appropriate means of communication, which can create complications in SL programs if not ironed out in the beginning."²⁹

Early in the spring 1995 semester, with the SL courses increasing to eleven offerings,³⁰ the steering committee hosted an open forum called "Service-Learning: How It Works" featuring students, faculty, and site representatives sharing their experiences from the fall semester. Of special interest was input from agency representatives, who stressed the following:

1. the *importance of commitment*, especially in tutoring.
2. either a regular weekly commitment over the entire semester or
3. an intensive commitment over a shorter period of time.
4. the importance of regular communication.
5. having a clear idea of the academic objectives of the course and any deadlines, preferably in writing.
6. the need to *complete* a project, rather than leaving the agency with extra work to finish it.
7. the need to do "exit" counseling with tutors and tutees before the end of the semester or year.³¹

Part of the problem underlying service-learning courses, apart from the above issues raised by the agency representatives,

stemmed from the way faculty ordinarily teach. Even if the faculty member no longer relied on the outdated lecture method and had incorporated the methodology of collaborative learning, the fact remained that faculty were unused to sharing authority in their courses. But service-learning relies on a different teaching dynamic: a four-way process involving student, faculty member, on-site supervisor, and the coordinator of service-learning, with each person shouldering part of the responsibility for the learning. If the faculty member, for whatever reason, failed to take class time to process the students' on-site experiences, or failed to keep in touch regularly with the students' on-site supervisors or, for that matter, with the Coordinator of Service-Learning, the support structure for accountability and optimum learning was jeopardized.

To help maximize the students' learning experience in a more efficiently run program, agency personnel advised more emphasis on commitment and communication—on all levels. As Machledt pointed out, "Partly because of the input from the community, most courses in the second semester were designed collaboratively between the professors, the community agencies, and the service-learning coordinator. Some ideas for the SL projects came from the agencies, and some were initiated by the faculty. It seems that the more dialogue and initial planning there was, the better the implementation of the SL project."³²

On the other hand, it should be pointed out that involvement in service-learning—especially taking into account the atmosphere created by the El Salvador experiences and the 30,000 Hours project—became more than simply teaching or taking a course. Any commitment to the poor—whether the poor be defined as disadvantaged Bridgeport students, young unwed mothers, the disenfranchised frequenting area soup kitchens, the mentally ill, the addicts, the homeless—was viewed by many on campus, not only as important and serious, but as a moral and civic responsibility that moved far beyond the boundaries of a normal class. "How do we help our students develop and become 'compassionate of heart'?" Dodge asked. "One of the first things that comes to me is the experience that we provide them in service-learning when they come face to face with other people,

and people that are in need, especially the poor. I don't know if you can become truly compassionate if you have been deprived of that kind of experience. And to really be service-learning, it has to be in the inner city, or with the poor wherever they are."³³

While the second group of service-learning courses were in mid-semester, Machledt concluded her March 1995 report by pointing out:

The real issue for deliberation and action next year is how to institutionalize service-learning so that every student has an opportunity for an experience before graduating. These issues obviously cannot be resolved overnight, but are important to the long-term success of the Service-Learning program.

Service-Learning will continue to grow at SHU as long as the faculty finds that it enhances learning, students gain from their service experiences in the community, and the community finds its needs are being met. The enthusiasm thus far by all three partners bodes well for the future of active collaboration between Sacred Heart University and the community.³⁴

Although not yet a University-funded staff member (the position funded by the CIC grant would terminate June 30), Machledt had more than proven her worth not only to the service-learning program, but to the whole notion of volunteerism on campus. Making sure she remained on campus with a funded staff line became a major goal for administrators closest to the program.³⁵

The National Institute on Service-Learning

To further investigate the potential of service-learning and to gauge the University's progress in the program thus far, a team of faculty, staff, and administrators traveled to St. Charles, Illinois, to attend the National Institute on Learning and Service held from May 31 to June 3.³⁶ President Bill Clinton, in a letter of greetings to delegates, set the tone for the conference. "Service is at the heart of our hopes for a stronger America," he wrote. "Across the

country, people are working together to solve problems in their communities and to teach young people the lessons of good citizenship." Then referring specifically to the work of the conference, the President added, "CIC's 'Serving to Learn, Learning to Serve' initiative is an important part of this national effort, developing programs that will make service-learning an integral part of the educational experience." Clinton closed his remarks by thanking the delegates for supporting his AmeriCorps program, and for bringing "community service into the classroom and curriculum."³⁷

CIC President Allen Splete pointed out that "the work we do here together—seeking ways to link learning and service—is important, timely, and directly relevant to the missions of independent colleges and universities as they serve students, and more broadly, the whole of society." Splete added, "Our efforts focus on meaningful curricular change. We believe that service-learning is central to our well-being as a society, and that its sustainability can result only when faculty embrace its legitimacy as part of the undergraduate learning experience." Referring to the special composition of the delegates, Splete said, "The institute is designed for institutional teams, since we hope that each participating institution will make actual improvements upon return to campus. We think that teams of individuals are the most effective means not only of developing sound ideas but also of implementing them."³⁸

Four members of the University team made presentations or participated on panels at the conference. Pilar Munday of the Modern Foreign Languages Department hosted a group of faculty to talk about service-learning issues in the teaching of Spanish; community agency representative Beverly Salzman, the executive director of Alpha Home, helped lead a panel discussion on the community perspective in service-learning; Eilene Bertsch served as a panelist discussing how colleges could interest faculty in service-learning and then support them in their initial work; and Phyllis Machledt co-hosted a session called "Strategies for Helping Students Succeed in Service-Learning Placement: Nuts and Bolts."³⁹

The conference "Preliminary Planning Worksheet" allowed the team to identify several issues that demanded special attention.

After recounting the University's commitment thus far to service-learning, several areas for growth were mentioned, including the need for the administration to persevere in its commitment to SL, and the need to find ways to recognize faculty (caught in the "publish or perish" atmosphere surrounding tenure and promotion) and students involved in the program. Also with regard to leadership and implementation of the SL program, the team recommended that faculty should assume a greater role, and "students could assume leadership positions for on-going service projects, such as the tutoring program." Finally there was the need "to see *meaningful* service integrated and stratified throughout all aspects of the University." Not only should every student "have a service experience" while at the University, community people should be integrated into the classroom as speakers and panelists as well.⁴⁰

In retrospect, the national conference arrived at an opportune time for the SL program at Sacred Heart University. With the program already in operation for a full academic year, the team was able to share experiences with colleagues from across the country, listen to how others tried to cope creatively with SL issues, and re-energize itself with a renewed sense of the program's significance. Even more to the point, the conference allowed the team the space and time to think creatively. In his conference greeting, Splete had hoped "that each participating institution will make actual improvements upon return to campus," and that was exactly what happened. On the return trip to campus, as members of the team sought answers to several questions—particularly the issue of how to engage more faculty in service-learning—suddenly an idea surfaced. Why not build on the El Salvador experience by hosting a weekend "urban plunge" for faculty and staff in the Park City? With Machledt's contacts among Bridgeport officials and grassroots organizations, and building on the experience of the El Salvador scheduling, the thinking was to bring faculty and staff into the city to listen to the voices of the people, opening the possibility for developing "connections" between the University and the needs of organizations and agencies. If the University could lend a hand by sharing its expertise in a specific area, or if a student service-learning placement could be identified—so much the better. And so "Operation Bridgeport" was born.

The Final CIC Report

Apart from the "Operation Bridgeport" program, which held its first weekend in the Park City early in the fall of 1995, several other promising initiatives were identified in Machledt's "Final CIC Grant Report," dated November 22 of that year. "A Spring Break service-learning work camp in El Salvador for Spanish, social work, history, and anthropology has been approved," she reported. Also an "'Urban Institute' with related courses, programs, films, and speakers, etc. has been proposed." Still another initiative was "a community service work camp" for "interested incoming freshmen, to be held in August 1996, before school starts."⁴¹ All these initiatives form the basis for the final chapters in this story of service at the University.

Closing her report, Machledt noted that the grant "was truly the impetus for allowing service-learning to have a reasonable 'trial' on campus," and that not only did students seem "more motivated in their service-learning courses," but there was also "an increased awareness of and involvement in community service among students in co-curricular activities." Finally, Machledt said, "integrating service with learning has been the keystone of the initiative to involve all areas of Sacred Heart in its mission," specifically noting the line in the mission statement that reads, "All members of the University community are encouraged strongly to participate in the wider community through service to others." Machledt then pointed out that the "CIC grant enabled Sacred Heart University to take a big step forward toward fulfilling this mission."⁴²

CHAPTER SIX

Moving to a New Plateau

When service-learning offerings moved service into the academic fabric of the school, Phyllis Machledt was faced with the tasks of nurturing the fledgling service-learning courses, defining and augmenting the volunteer efforts of the community, and serving as a liaison between the University and Greater Bridgeport's schools and social service providers. On the service-learning side, attracting faculty to offer more discipline-related courses, while at the same time working to ensure that the University weighed community service appropriately for tenure and promotion, remained priorities; with regard to volunteerism at the school, the director assumed responsibility for coordinating the efforts of student clubs, organizations, and athletic teams. Then, to promote and expand the school's involvement in the lives of the poor, the director set up her office as a clearing-house, taking in-coming calls for assistance from local social service providers, alerting appropriate on-campus volunteers to respond to those needs, arranging travel to and from the sites, and often joining in with and overseeing the students' on-site work.

With firm backing from the administration (including the President, the Vice President and Provost, the Vice President for Mission and Planning, and the Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs), several service initiatives inaugurated in the mid-1990s brought the concept of community service to a new plateau at Sacred Heart University, ensuring that the school's connection

with the poor, started in the 1960s with its earliest community outreach programs, would remain a centerpiece of its day-to-day volunteer efforts and a central focus of its educational mission.

Operation Bridgeport

"Whenever you rub elbows with the poor you grow," said Msgr. Joseph Potter, the pastor of St. Charles Church on the East Side of Bridgeport, speaking to the first University delegates to participate in Operation Bridgeport. "God is present to the poor in a special way," added Sr. Ann Moles, the director of Outreach Programs for the parish. "In fact," she said, "the only people who can teach us to live are the poor. And how do we see the grace of the poor? We have to walk with them."¹

Walking with the poor was why several faculty and staff members—including the University President—convened in September 1995 at the St. Charles Urban Center to participate in the first Operation Bridgeport weekend. We were there to listen to the people's stories, take time out to reflect on personal missions and on the stated mission of the University, and build bridges between the University and the East Side by trying to figure out how to assist in the rebirth of that community. "What is most important to me about Operation Bridgeport," said Cernera, "is that it gives expression to a fundamental aspect of the University's mission—to understand and be responsive to the needs of the Bridgeport community."²

A *Connecticut Post* article reported, "Uppermost on the operational agenda was defining ways in which the university's resources—primarily a small army of 250 student volunteers who participate in service programs as part of their studies—could best be put to use in Bridgeport. To find out, educators went straight to the experts—the residents themselves. . . . Their purpose was to listen and learn."³ Dodge, quoted in the same article, said, "We know we can't replicate in a weekend what it's like living in fear and lacking the basics, like food and shelter." But, she added, "We are trying to have a sense of what the University can do."⁴

Perhaps Robert Sigmon, the director of Learning Design Initiatives in Raleigh, North Carolina, articulated best what

educators needed to do. "I now often suggest to service-learning and community service educators," said Sigmon, "that we slow down, even curtail some of our direct service work, and examine what we are doing, by going into communities and organizations to 'sit down, be quiet, and pay attention.'" Then, he continued, "we can enter into mutually-fulfilling arrangements where we can be learners and teachers, servers and served."⁵ As Fr. Brackley already had pointed out to our delegations visiting the University of Central America: we didn't need to fly all the way to El Salvador to have our hearts broken by the stories of the poor; we could encounter that reality in our own backyard. Operation Bridgeport would serve as a test for Brackley's thesis, and at the same time we hoped it would identify several new service options.

Bertsch, one of the founders of Operation Bridgeport, reflected on the motivation for entering into a dialogue with the Park City community when she noted the need to build "into the life of the University the fact that the community would remain a partner in our lives." It was necessary, in her mind, to make that commitment concrete, visible, and lasting. She asked, "How can we do that if we do not see, and we do not listen, and we do not hear the people in the neighborhood that we wish to work with?" She recalled the first Operation Bridgeport weekend in these words:

We lived there for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and listened and learned and met the people from the neighborhood. We met the people from Luis Muñoz Marín School, met the wonderful children who go to school there and the teachers. We went to the Caroline House and saw what those sisters were doing with the mothers and children of immigrants who come to this country. And we went to Alpha Home and met the people at Merton House, and talked to the police, and listened about economic development, and brought in the neighbors of St. Charles and listened to them. They told us about who they were, what their neighborhood was like, how they lived there, and how they had grown up there. And probably the most special feature of the entire thing is that we asked a group of our students, who lived in the

East Side of Bridgeport, to take the risk to trust us that we really wanted to learn from them because we knew they had things to teach us. We asked about five of them to come and be our teachers and guides.

Bertsch concluded her reminiscence by saying, "We had the most remarkable, wonderful three days with our students, our new-found neighbors, the church at St. Charles, and with Monsignor Potter, the pastor there who was the most extraordinary man." Then she added, "He welcomed us in much the same way that the people of El Salvador had welcomed us."⁶

The stories heard at St. Charles told of a city emerging from the throes of an ongoing battle to reclaim the streets from warring gangs. The worst of times was over, the residents agreed, and a cautious rebuilding process was underway.⁷ We heard eyewitness accounts of when the gangs ruled the streets, sold drugs openly, and murdered the opposition and innocent bystanders with bursts of bullets from assault weapons. At one point, even a former mayor, talking on the steps of Holy Rosary Church, was injured by gunfire. But recently, our group learned, the gangs had lost ground, thanks to the efforts of grassroots organizers and the community policing philosophy of Thomas Sweeney, the new police chief. Once essentially a war zone, with firefights breaking out any time of the day or night, the delegation heard about an East Side slowly edging its way back to life, battling street by street to win over the hearts and minds of its residents.

"When the police first asked people in the neighborhood to join with them, to build community groups, to fight back," reported the *New York Times*, "they didn't open their doors." The same article noted that "residents were fearful and cynical."⁸ According to the testimony of East Side Community Council President Karen Daden, "At night you made sure you were not sitting in any room that was on the perimeter of your house. Most people spent a lot of time in their bathrooms, which in many of these old houses, for whatever reason, are exactly in the center of the house. Why? Because 9-millimeter bullets could travel between two or three walls, and usually there's four or five walls between you and the outside wall. That was the fear that

was here."⁹ One student who spoke to the group remembered, "They dumped a body right across the street from where I live. I had to walk through there. It's kind of scary when people are finding bags with a person chopped up."¹⁰

Community organizers and grassroots leaders, well aware of the city's problems, knew what it would take to effect permanent change. "I would be lying to you if I said it's the system that's causing all these problems," said Jorge Jaiman, the director of Crime Prevention for Bridgeport. "It's a multitude of things causing the problems, particularly the people's reluctance to get involved. We don't need any more studies. If people don't know what the problems are, then they might just as well hang up their shingles and move out of town. We don't need anybody else coming in here and telling us, 'Oh, there's problems.' We know that. Any idiot who walks the streets knows there's problems, and he knows what those problems are." Then Jaiman added, "We need people who are willing to give of their time and help us train other people in leadership skills, in how to think. You might say, 'What are you talking about?' It's how to put things together, how to problem solve. How to develop projects. How to sit down and formulate a plan that's going to be effective." Finally, Jaiman asked the Sacred Heart group, "How do we use people as a resource?" Then he admitted, "I don't think we really understand it ourselves. We need your expertise."¹¹

During the reflection period that closed the first weekend, our group, following the structure of the El Salvador trips, talked about memorable experiences that took place during the brief stay in the East Side, then drew up an action list of some thirty "Possible Responses . . . to Perceived Community Needs." Dodge collated the responses for follow-up suggestions, and on November 27 sent the delegation members a sheet with "Operation Bridgeport Follow-up Projects" that indicated "preferences for working committees," and that asked the groups to get together to "try to flesh out the idea/project."¹² The list earmarked the following:

- Offer a course at Sacred Heart University. Provide mentors/members of Art Club to teach computer graphics (Jack de Graffenried)

- Respond to Jorge Jaiman's request for SHU training in community leadership (Ralph Corrigan, Gerry Reid, Tony Cernera)
- Establish a Center for Social Work/Psychology students to work with St. Charles; establish a Nursing Services Center broadly conceived (focus on issues of general health and community health); address Sr. Ann's concern: counseling for children (Mike McLernon, Linda Strong, Phyllis Machledt)
- Establish an SHU version of the Jesuit Volunteer Corp (JVC) (Christel Manning, Donna Dodge)
- Rely on the University for its expertise in teaching and research—conduct research: give back to community information relevant to its needs; explore economic development/crime/social issues; record local history (Ricardo Cordova, Charlotte Gradie, Eilene Bertsch)¹³

Even a glance at the above list of “preferred” projects suggests two things: first, that the University was taking seriously what the president had called “an ongoing commitment to the city and people of Bridgeport”¹⁴; and second, that only a few of the proposals were immediately “doable” with limited funding and within a reasonable time-frame. Others, such as setting up centers and a volunteer corps, indicated a level of commitment the University hoped to make, but called for long-range planning and the writing of grant proposals to attract funding. In the case of research projects, many of the proposed studies would eventually be conducted by students in service-learning courses.¹⁵

As of this writing, seven Operation Bridgeport weekends have introduced over fifty faculty, staff, and administrators of the University to their neighbors in the Park City. The University continues to fund the Bridgeport weekends to introduce faculty and staff to programs and the people of the inner city that they might not otherwise meet; to build bridges between town and gown that allow University volunteers to work side by side with city residents to build understanding and a more promising future; to learn first-hand the needs of schools, community organizations,

and social service agencies so faculty can devise appropriate service-learning components in their courses, and so faculty and staff can better determine where and how they might commit personal time to volunteer efforts; to help University administrators continue planning for a permanent Sacred Heart University presence at St. Charles; and, finally, to provide the space for Sacred Heart people to come together to share a mind-opening experience and to create an enriched sense of community. "The combination of physically living on the East Side in Bridgeport," said Machledt, "listening to the stories of local residents, discussing issues with Bridgeport residents who are tied to the University but are living and working in the community, has proven to be a powerful learning experience."¹⁶

Habitat for Humanity

In March of 1995, through the efforts of several members of the University community, what in the past had been an on-going but sporadic commitment to help build Habitat for Humanity houses in Bridgeport took on a new character when the Campus Chapter of Habitat for Humanity International was officially chartered, a distinction noted in the *Sacred Heart University* magazine that made the school "the first university in Fairfield County to be so designated and just the fourth in Connecticut."¹⁷ Recalling the planning for the campus chapter, Phyllis Machledt talked about meeting with Jim Westgate, a financial analyst for the University, who had been active in building houses in Kentucky. "Jim and I talked about the fact that we wanted to start a campus chapter," Machledt said. "He and I both felt that it needed to be more than just a casual thing that people signed up for." At the same time, Machledt also praised the commitment to the program made by Dr. John Roney of the History Department, a skilled carpenter and long-time Habitat worker. "All three of us were involved in the beginning, and we really pushed it," Machledt said. "We really wanted to have it not just students, but for faculty and staff as well."¹⁸

"Our basic goal," said Westgate, who served as the campus Habitat advisor, "is to provide active assistance towards the

improvement of living conditions in our community of Bridgeport."¹⁹ Annette Bosley, an English and Spanish major and president of the chapter, said "We go into Bridgeport monthly and help Habitat sites," adding, "We do painting, carpentry, and even dig holes."²⁰ Machledt, the past president of Habitat's Greater Bridgeport chapter, said, "We target our building efforts within specific neighborhoods in order to make a dramatic change in the neighborhood and to provide a safer area for Habitat families."²¹ Recalling the motives that spurred him to embrace Habitat work, Roney offered this self-examination:

I believe that as a university community, we are responsible for the greater community around us. We should never see ourselves as isolated. Bridgeport is our larger community, and as a university community we must do something. Habitat is one of many things we can do.

I have worked as a carpenter all my life. I love to work with my hands, to create, to work hard physically, and to construct buildings. Religiously, this fits into my Christian worldview. I believe that God intends that fallen creation and humanity are to be redeemed and restored. While God has many means to do this, God also uses ordinary people to accomplish the divine will. No matter what I do at Habitat I feel that it's part of much larger things going on; so I don't have to worry about every detail or controlling every structure. The very little that I accomplish is never lost, it's never for naught.

I have come to the understanding that the degree to which we come to value others we come to value ourselves. I need to work there in order to re-find the proper perspective of my place in the larger world. I need to work at Habitat in order to find myself. I need to lose my life in order to find it (a biblical paraphrase).

Economically, there is a sort of adrenaline flow that I get when I volunteer in this way; it's hard to explain. In a materialistic world where everyone is getting billed for every hour (like an accountant or lawyer), this work stands in the place of economic motives. My paycheck is

pure love, and no one can put a monetary value on that, right? I feel that relationships are restored when we work together with others for free!²²

With Machledt, Westgate, and Roney serving as mentors, the Habitat chapter soon developed into the largest, most active service organization on campus.

Once the chapter was fully chartered and underway, it was only a matter of time before the group would look to expand its operations. Then Machledt proposed an idea for the 1997 Spring Break. "Here we are in Bridgeport hosting all these other schools coming. Why don't we go some place?" she asked.²³ Soon "a group of twelve commuter and resident students and two advisers set out on their inaugural Sacred Heart Habitat for Humanity extended work-trip to rebuild houses in a low-income section of Baltimore."²⁴ Machledt recalled, "We looked at what would be feasible in terms of money, and made some phone calls. We were looking for another urban Habitat, and then Fr. Mike suggested Francis House because he knew Baltimore pretty well, and so we found a place to stay. And it just sort of fell together."²⁵ Sandtown Habitat, where the group helped build row houses, Machledt added, had "a very holistic approach to community development—putting your faith into action."²⁶ After the first trip in 1997, the campus Habitat chapter returned to Sandtown for three more Spring Break work-sessions.

Then the group came up with an even more ambitious initiative: to sponsor the construction of a house in Bridgeport. Before long "a coalition of students from the University's Habitat campus chapter and two Catholic churches, 'The Community Builders,' pooled their resources to construct a new, affordable home for a low-income family," reported an article in the *Sacred Heart University* magazine. "Beginning in the late summer 1999," the article noted, "literally hundreds of volunteers from the University community, St. Charles Church of Bridgeport, and St. James Church of Stratford wielded hammers, saws, and other tools at the site."²⁷

The house, built on the corner of Shelton and Hallett streets—a site made infamous a few years back by drugs and

eighteen murders—became a rallying point for University service, much like the 30,000 Hours project. Bertsch had this to say about building the house:

When Habitat for Humanity, our chapter, and our students—who I think are probably some of the most remarkable students I've ever met—had raised 13 to 15 thousand dollars for this house, we tried to make sure that that house we built would be in St. Charles Parish. And that house that we have built—the roof is on, the siding is up, we're up to the point of insulation—that house is on Shelton Street which is about three blocks away from the St. Charles Urban Center, two blocks away from the Luis Muñoz Marín School, centered right in the neighborhood. And you know you walk by that house and you see here's a living house that has gone back to Operation Bridgeport, to our involvement in St. Charles, to our connection to our neighbor, and to finding another way to try and make that connection and keep it alive. So the house is a very important symbol."²⁸

To build the house, work groups needed to be assembled, transported to the work site, assigned specific jobs, trained, and then supervised; and all this had to be accomplished within a given time frame and in cooperation with the two other volunteer groups. As for the University contingent, "Perhaps none were more instrumental in bringing the project to fruition," reported Don Harrison, "than the 15 students who comprise Habitat's campus chapter building committee, and their advisors, Dr. John Roney, associate professor of History, and Phyllis Machledt, director of Service-Learning and Volunteer Programs." The same article noted, "Not only did the University community supply labor in droves, but it also contributed \$20,000 toward the cost of the home and gathered \$10,000 in in-kind gifts."²⁹ Recalling the fundraising efforts of the students, Bertsch said, "that particular group of students went to extraordinary lengths to raise that 20 thousand dollars. It was continuous over two full years. Two years of sustained activity to raise that money, and raising every bit of it

themselves. They even had a sleep-out in boxes on the lawn to raise money, and they collected bottles and cans from everywhere under the sun. They designed, made and sold Habitat pins, cookbooks, shirts. There was an unbelievable commitment to that project."³⁰

A group of smiling, proud Sacred Heart workers who had banded together to accomplish something special attended the dedication ceremonies of the house on January 23, 2000. Members of Habitat construction crew from the University and the Burgos family—the proud owners of the new home—crowded on the front porch and steps and overflowed into the front yard to savor the accomplishment that everyone had worked so hard to achieve. "There was a distinct Sacred Heart University flavor to the dedication ceremonies," reported Harrison. "Dee Young '97, a social worker with the St. Vincent's Center for Behavioral Health in Bridgeport, provided a moving rendition of the song, 'There is Hope in the Night.' Thomas Wilson '88, a parishioner at St. James Church, read scripture. Darlene Harris, a junior from Derby, gave the opening prayers, and Angela Bowden, a junior from East Marion, New York, recited a poem she wrote for the occasion. And Machledt, long active in Bridgeport's Habitat circles, served as emcee." Later, in recognition of the accomplishment, Sean Otterspoor (a senior from Trumbull, the president of the campus Habitat chapter, and an indefatigable presence on the Hallett and Shelton streets worksite) and Machledt were honored at the "Hearts and Hammers Ball," a "black-tie dinner sponsored by Habitat for Humanity of Greater Bridgeport, held at the Inn at Longshore in Westport."³¹

Always on the lookout for new Habitat site experiences, Otterspoor and company "went to extraordinary lengths this summer—13 time zones and 12,000 miles away—to build Habitat homes in the Philippines," reported *Fairfield County Catholic* in its September 2000 issue. The group³² spent the first two weeks in August working "side-by-side with the future residents, who are known as Home Partners, in humid 90-degree temperatures," to build four "cinderblock and cement dwellings in Tagaytay, a community located on the rim of an extinct volcano about two hours south of Manila."³³ According to the *Fairfield County*

Catholic article, "The new homes might be modest by U.S. standards, but they represent a significant upgrade for the new owners. Each 12-by-12 foot house consists of just one room, with a 'mezzanine' or loft serving as sleeping quarters. But there is electricity, running water, and toilet facilities."³⁴ Senior Angela Bowden, president of the campus Habitat chapter, placed the work trip in perspective when she said simply, "The Philippines definitely was a different experience. I'd been doing Habitat locally and going to Baltimore for Spring Break, but going to another culture gave you a different perspective on things."³⁵

Continuing its efforts as the most active volunteer organization on campus, and to serve as a kickoff for the new year, on September 8, billed in the campus paper as "a night to remember," the Sacred Heart University Habitat chapter hosted a special occasion: an on-campus visit of Millard Fuller, the founder and president for Humanity International, who came to speak for the Anniversary Habitation. "This was a celebration with the families that own homes because of the help of Habitat for Humanity," reported the *Spectrum*. "One hundred and fifty families showed up" for the evening's events.³⁶ "This event was a fitting tribute to the extraordinary achievements of all the members of the campus Habitat chapter, past and present," said Machledt. "This group exemplifies what it really means to put the directives of the school's mission statement into practice."³⁷

Spring Breaks in El Salvador

Another new initiative involved annual student work trips to El Salvador. Once the faculty and staff trips to that country proved successful, it was only a matter of time before students were invited to participate in a Salvadoran work experience. Two students, Gloria Irizarry and Angela Donohue, already had accompanied the faculty and staff during the summer 1993 trip, but the thinking at the University—particularly that of Dr. María Teresa Torreira, Dr. Katherine Kidd (director of Global Studies), Eilene Bertsch, and Sr. Donna Dodge—was that a delegation of students would benefit more from a "work experience" in El Salvador, and that the best time to plan for such a trip would be during Spring Break.

A connection already had been made through the efforts of Torreira and the student group *La Hispanidad* when they adopted the school at Hacienda California. Then in the fall of 1995 a good friend from El Salvador, Sr. Elena Jaramillo, who has devoted her life to helping Salvadorans displaced by the war, visited the campus to meet with students, University officials, and members from past delegations that visited her adopted country. A report written in 1998 provides a useful overview of this remarkable woman:

An American by nationality, and a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange, California, Elena (as she prefers to be called) has been working with the poor in El Salvador for some ten years now. The families of San Hilario are particularly close to her heart. Through her work, she is helping them learn to live and work together as a civil and religious community and as responsible citizens of their country. She believes deeply in the Church's mission to serve the poor, and demonstrates that commitment in her every waking moment. It was Elena who, with Dr. María Teresa Torreira (former language chair at SHU who retired in 1997 after serving the University for over thirty years), selected San Hilario as the destination for SHU's student delegations.³⁸

Kidd said, "Having Sr. Elena visit the University is very important . . . because she embodies the commitment we have to El Salvador." At the same time Bertsch remembered Sr. Elena "as a gift. . . . There was such a sense of peacefulness about her, coupled with a sense of great strength. And she saw the richness in the people she served."³⁹ With Sr. Elena providing a personal link to the area, soon plans were underway to send the first delegation of students to work in El Salvador.

During the fall of 1995, while the logistics for a spring trip were worked out, other connections to El Salvador were in full swing: a small group of faculty and administrators drafted a proposal that would ensure the University's continued involvement in the Land of the Saviour;⁴⁰ and Shelley Lyford, a Global

Studies major, was in the country collecting data for her senior thesis on Non-Governmental Organization-sponsored health projects in rural El Salvador. "I spent three amazing days in Suchitoto in an adobe house made of mud and burlap with a family of eleven," wrote Lyford in a letter to the *Spectrum*. "I have never seen such poverty in my life. My family lived in a two-room house with a dirt floor, no electricity, and no water."⁴¹ Ending her letter to the University community, Lyford wrote, "This has been a very humbling experience. I have taken so much for granted in my life and I know I will return to the States much more appreciative than when I left in September."⁴²

As the trip moved from its planning stages to its implementation, students hoping to participate in the first work trip to El Salvador were subjected to a rigorous selection process: they had to have completed or "be currently enrolled in either Spanish, history, or social work courses," and were required to prove proficiency in Spanish, carpentry, or masonry. They also underwent "training by rendering services for Habitat for Humanity" in Bridgeport, and attended two orientation workshops prior to the trip.⁴³

Once in the country, they stayed in a village with "no indoor plumbing or running water. In addition there was little electricity and scarce contact with the outside world. Those who participated on the trip lived just as the villagers in a small cement building,"⁴⁴ and spent their days working to rebuild masonry terraces for a salt works factory. "It was an absolutely amazing experience, something I will never forget," said Greg Botello.⁴⁵ In another article on the trip, Botello was quoted as saying, "Going there has changed my life. . . . It was incredible how despite losing everything in the war and having no real material things, the people are so close and supportive of each other and are genuinely hopeful and happy."⁴⁶

Machledt, one of the advisers on the trip, offered the following perspective on the experience: "We learned a lot by living right there with the people. . . . We learned what it's like to be in a country torn apart by a bitter war. We learned about the role the United States played in that war. But most of all we learned about courage and dignity of the people and how they endure, despite everything." And finally, Torreira said, "This was

the kind of trip these students are going to remember for the rest of their lives, no question about that."⁴⁷

Since the first trip in 1996, annual delegations of students and faculty advisers have traveled to El Salvador during spring break, returning to the village of San Hilario about five miles south of Sr. Elena's parish of Tierra Blanca, where they helped construct a community center and pavilion, new classrooms on the primitive school building, and a concrete basketball court. Much of the continued success of these visits can be attributed to the efforts of two people: Dr. Lauren Kempton, formerly of the Education Department, and her husband Brooks Parmelee. "These trips could not happen," said Bertsch, "were it not for Lauren and Brooks. They are the ones who keep in touch with Sr. Elena throughout the year, and they are the ones who anticipate the trip and the needs of the students." Dodge agreed. "It's like a synergy, an energy, that's there," she said. "It's part of their lives, and integral to who they are."⁴⁸

In the spring of 1997, Torreira, speaking about the success of the second trip, said in an article in the *Sacred Heart University* magazine, "For me to see our students working so closely with the Salvadoran people, this is what made this trip so special." The work days for this second delegation were described as follows: "Mornings were spent creating a level foundation for the church-community center or digging post holes and painting decorations on the walls in a new, yet primitive, two-room elementary school. Wheelbarrows, shovels, and paintbrushes were the tools of the day. During the afternoon heat, which often exceeded 100 degrees, the students played games with the youngsters in the village."⁴⁹

Parmelee captured the experiences of the third delegation in 1998 as follows:

After an early breakfast on Friday morning, we went to work. The basketball court we had been asked to build was located in a field between the community center and a daycare facility on one side and the village school on the other. We met our local project leader, Roberto, and discussed the project with him. After concluding that it would make better sense to build a "half-court" rather

than a full court, we spent the day shoveling dirt fill into the walled area on which the court was to be built. On this day,⁴⁸ we established the pattern for our work days: each day we would work from 7 A.M. to about 1 P.M., break for lunch and a short "siesta" and then resume work again from about 3 P.M. to 6 or 6:30. While most of us worked on the basketball court, Dr. Kempton worked at the daycare center next door, providing guidance and training for the teachers and reading stories to the children. She also made sure we always had ample supplies of water and soda to drink.

Every day many local men, women and children—all volunteers—chipped in to help us fill and level the site. Everything was done by hand, and each day we took regular breaks to cool off in the shade of the community center, the "*quiosco*." The weather was clear and extremely hot every day, with afternoon temperatures approaching 100° F, so we consumed prodigious quantities of water and soda. Dehydration is a very real risk in such a climate, so our breaks were both welcome and necessary.⁵⁰

Writing about the living conditions in San Hilario for the student workers, Parmelee reported, "The women's house, incidentally, had an advantage over the men's house in that it had a tiled floor. The floor of the men's house was dirt. Neither house had any furniture in it, other than our cots and a hammock, but each house had an electric light in the middle of the ceiling and occasional running water nearby, a major improvement since last year, when neither electricity nor running water had yet reached the village."⁵¹

The May 4, 2000 issue of the *Spectrum* reported on the fourth trip: "From 1996 through 1999, the group's destination each year was the village of San Hilario, a community visited by SHU's first faculty delegation to El Salvador in 1992." But for the 2000 Spring Break trip, "Sister Elena, the group's coordinator in El Salvador, suggested that the group live and work instead in a neighboring community, the village of Los Ensayos, which was still very much in need of the kind of help SHU delegates have provided to San

Hilario. The people of Los Ensayos wanted to build their own community center, and when Elena told them SHU could help, they went right to work. By the time the delegation arrived on March second, the villagers had already acquired the necessary land and had just begun work on the building itself."⁵² The article explained how the delegates pitched in: "They helped mix cement and put up the cinder-block walls of the building. They hauled dirt into the building by the wheel-barrow load, creating a floor one foot above the ground around the building. They cleared tree stumps and weeds from the lot, and leveled the lot itself so rainwater will drain away toward the road."⁵³

In spite of the primitive living conditions and hard physical labor encountered in El Salvador, the overwhelming response from participants is that the trips have been "once-in-a-lifetime, eye-opening" learning experiences about the realities of life in a third-world country that previously the students only vaguely thought about, if at all. In fact, living with the *compesinos* in rural El Salvador changed the students. They arrived back in the States with a new-found belief of the power of the spirit in the lives of the poor because they had witnessed the workings of that spirit with their own eyes; they returned humbled by the outpouring of love received from the people they tried to help; and they arrived home with a different, more informed perspective on the essentials that define the "good life." For many, the life of conspicuous consumption, of thinking that the ownership of "things" is the answer to happiness, came under harsh scrutiny. How was it possible, they thought to themselves, that these *compesinos* who had little or nothing in the way of material goods could be so generous of heart, so filled with hope, so spiritually alive?

To sum up the El Salvador experience in 2000, Dr. Terry Neu of the Education Department, who accompanied the students and who was joined on the trip by his wife Jane (a nurse) and son, recounted the story of the Red Hen:

My wife had diagnosed and treated an eye infection in many of the local children of Los Ensayos. Specifically it was concentrated in the households around the new community center the SHU delegation was helping to

construct. Every morning and every evening we would bring and administer the medication to the eyes of five beautiful children of El Salvador. The parents of these children typically thanked us and we would work side by side with them the next day tying steel and laying brick for the new community center.

One of the parents always greeted us in the morning but never came over to the work site. On the sixth day we realized why he did not join in the community effort. The father of two of the children with eye infections was stricken with severe arthritis. He came to the work site with a large fat red hen. The gentleman told us he was unable to work with us because of his hands but he wanted to contribute to our efforts. My poor understanding of Spanish could not make out the next phrase he kept repeating. After translation he stated, "We are poor Pipil (local native Indians) and you are of Royal Blood. Please take this chicken so that I can support your labor."

Now being a native Texan and used to consuming a fresh range hen I accepted his gift gratefully. Then what hit the delegation in total was the realization that the gentleman had only 10 chickens. He was giving one tenth of his wealth to support our labor. One tenth tied up in a red hen and he was willing to give it to us?

My twelve-year-old son and I were ready to fry the hen Southern style, when we thought the hen would best serve as an egg layer for the future. Currently she resides with Sister Elena in the Mission at Tierra Blanca and lays eggs for her consumption.⁵⁴

This incident, Neu admits, "brought many of the delegation to tears." As is evident in this anecdote, and so many other memories that stream through the minds of the student-participants, El Salvador teaches lessons that will not be forgotten—which is why the annual trips during Spring Break continue to attract more applicants each year than the program can accommodate.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Recent Service Initiatives

Starting with the school's revised mission statement that recommended service to the poor, and then the trips to El Salvador that enabled the University community to better see the needs of its next-door neighbors in Bridgeport, several key administrators continued to search for innovative ways to further institutionalize service. A Catholic institution of higher learning, they believed, should encourage campus people to interface with those who could use a helping hand. Then, as the millennium approached, several promising initiatives began to take shape.

Community Connections

Along with the Habitat projects and the annual trips to El Salvador, a new community service experience was proposed to attract entering Sacred Heart University students. Community Connections—a week-long urban plunge (a boot-camp for volunteers)—familiarizes freshmen with the needs of the city of Bridgeport while at the same time identifying who among the students most likely would be the school's next leaders of service efforts. "At my job interview they asked me what I would consider doing," said Phyllis Machledt, "and I said that it made sense to do something with incoming freshmen." Machledt was impressed with a program called Urban Action at Princeton, and thought that Sacred Heart University could offer something

similar. "I'd seen what they had done," she said. "It made sense because it was a project that would get freshmen involved right off the bat. And it certainly seemed to fit in terms of developing student leadership."¹ So it was only a matter of time before she orchestrated the first Community Connections experience. "When we felt that we knew the neighborhood well enough ourselves," said Eilene Bertsch, "we invited students to take that trip with us. We now have twenty students at the beginning of each year, entering freshmen, who come to Bridgeport and live at St. Charles."²

"Service in the community is an integral part of the mission of Sacred Heart University," announces the Community Connections brochure, which also notes the many opportunities for involvement at the school, including service-learning projects, Campus Ministry programs, and the volunteer efforts of clubs and organizations. Students applying for a slot on the Community Connections team are told that "previous construction or teaching experience" is not necessary, but "a positive attitude, a willingness to work together, an open mind, and a sense of humor are important." After completing the workday, the brochure explains, participants—aided by Campus Ministry staff, professors, administrators, and upperclassmen—"reflect on the experience of the day with special emphasis on the social, political, or religious implications of that experience."³

The first Community Connections experience took place in August 1996, when a total of eighteen students (fourteen freshmen and four upperclass student leaders) spent the week prior to the beginning of the fall term "working where the community needed the help the most," said Machledt. Besides introducing the students to Bridgeport and to some twenty faculty and staff (including the President and Academic Vice-President) who participated in the activities at different times during the week, "The project," said Machledt, "was to get freshmen involved early with other students who have similar interests."⁴ Summing up the service activities, Don Harrison wrote, "For the better part of the week prior to the start of classes, they prepared meals at a soup kitchen and wielded tools at a Habitat for Humanity building site; they performed landscaping and clean-up chores and read aloud to elementary

school classes before retiring for the night at the St. Charles Urban Center on the city's East Side."⁵

"Many times people come in to an experience like this expecting to change other people or the world," said Machledt, but "what really happens is that *you* change and *you* and *your* perceptions change. I've seen students grow up this week. Service-learning may be outside the classroom, but it's a valuable component of education." Senior volunteer leader Liz Rathburn agreed, saying that the program gives freshmen "an idea of what they can accomplish. They see the community and really reach out to people." One incoming student, Julia Torpey, said simply, "The more you give of yourself, the more you grow." Another freshman, Mark Ungeheuer, added, "It's not just the fact that you're feeding people that makes this work so important. It's treating people with respect and saying, 'Hi, how are you doing.'" Rathburn was asked if she thought the week was successful. "Is it successful? It's beyond a success," she said.⁶

Other participants were equally enthusiastic about their week of sharing and learning. "I definitely formed a special group of friends because of the shared experience," said Sean Otterspoor, a campus Habitat leader. Tara Cangemi spoke about how the week-long experience opened her eyes to new worlds. "Community Connections has served as a gateway for my entire college career," she said. "It opened my eyes to the reality of the real world. With Community Connections I was given a sense of the value of teamwork and how such a unifying effort can be the cause of remarkable change." Another student found the week a confidence builder. "Returning to campus when Community Connections was over," said Darlene Harris, "I was filled with confidence, satisfaction, and pride . . . in our accomplishments."⁷

By stressing the importance of service, Community Connections makes a strong statement at the beginning of the school year about the University's priorities. It provides a select group of incoming students with a week-long, memorable inner-city volunteer experience; it identifies several work sites for future student social action; it promotes growth of personal identity and pride in personal accomplishment; it helps ease the transition from high school, family, and home life to the realities of living with

strangers at a residential college; it develops a sense of belonging to the Sacred Heart University family even before the regular school year begins; it introduces several key administrators and staff members who play a significant role in the life of the college freshman; it creates a bonding mechanism for the participants with other like-minded students who will be working together on service projects for the next four years; and it teaches one of the central "givens" of service: that volunteers receive far more than they give.

"This is a week we will remember for the rest of our lives," Machledt concluded.⁸

CURTIS Week

The e-mail message announcing another innovative week-long service project in Bridgeport asked two questions: "Interested in community work and diversity issues? Want to do something positive in these areas?" Aimed at students looking for an alternative winter intersession experience who missed either Spring Break in El Salvador or Community Connections, the e-mail announcing the first CURTIS Week experience invited students to "consider joining with a diverse group of students to live, work, learn, and reflect together" in Bridgeport.⁹ Named in honor of the school's founding bishop, CURTIS Week (Community Understanding and Reflection through Inner-City Service) promised the experience of "community life at St. Charles Urban Center," and the chance to explore "issues such as poverty, immigration, racism, and changing economic conditions." These issues, announced the information sheet, "as well as concepts of service and social justice, will be topics for discussions with faculty, students, and community leaders."¹⁰

"Once we started doing Community Connections," said Machledt, "I still saw a need for a week where students who weren't freshmen could have an immersion experience in Bridgeport." Machledt also wanted to honor Martin Luther King, and since across the country people were beginning to recognize Martin Luther King Day as a day of community service, she thought "why don't we do a week-long experience, do it before

the second semester, and tie it to Martin Luther King and the issue of diversity." Machledt said to prospective students, "This is something we've been talking about in discussion groups, but this is a chance to really live together and work together." She knew from personal experience that intensive involvement in community "led to more changes in attitude than just discussion."¹¹

The e-mail message and Machledt's personal contacts with students worked: eight men and eight women signed up for the first CURTIS Week, held January 12 to 17, 2000. The students worked at "Habitat for Humanity sites, Merton House soup kitchen, Remesa East Elderly Day Care Center, and Caroline House, and tutoring at Columbus and Marin elementary schools."¹² Then during the evening reflection periods at the Urban Center, students talked about the social, political, and religious implications of the day's experiences.¹³ But what pleased Machledt the most was the diversity among the group itself. "We had several African-American students, and we had four different religions so it was a very interesting mixture of faiths. We had the jocks, the campus ministry types, the service people, and the marines. It was really a mixed bag," said Machledt, who credited much of the success of the program to the student leaders.¹⁴ "Three of the four had been involved with Community Connections and were actively involved with Habitat or schools," she said, "and were expected to be in charge of some of the service projects." Machledt added, "I also wanted leaders who would be willing to lead discussions."¹⁵

The CURTIS Week Information Sheet outlined several ambitious goals: "We hope to introduce students to the issues of diversity and poverty in the Bridgeport community through service and reflection, to create a caring community of students, to involve faculty and staff in the week with the students, and to discuss positive approaches to the issues of racism and prejudice in the community and on the SHU campus."¹⁶ A *Spectrum* article on CURTIS Week quoted Machledt: "There are issues of racism and prejudice on this campus and it's something we have to work on." She added, "We have to ask ourselves why we have such extreme inequalities that are unfair. We can't just fear our differences."¹⁷

The week started out in the campus chapel with a "Sending Ceremony" that included this opening prayer by Patricia Leonard-Pasley from Campus Ministry:

God of new beginnings grasp the hearts
Of these CURTIS Week participants
Encourage them to
Ask the difficult questions and
To seek out the ancient paths.
To ask where the good way is,
And to walk it.
Stir in them a Holy discontent for a world
Which gives its gifts to those who have plenty already
And turns away from those who have little of what
they need.
And above all Lord,
Dare them to risk everything
For love of you,
And may the rest of us prove
Worthy companions
For the journey ahead.

Amen.

Then the ceremony ended with these words of blessing: "Guide them as they struggle / to separate light from darkness — / And in the changes they seek to shape / May they in turn be shaped. / Amen."

The first CURTIS Week turned out to be a rich sharing experience for the students. "Meeting as a group each evening at the St. Charles Urban Center—where they lived for four nights—they agreed that the time was well spent and helped eliminate some misconceptions about the inner city," wrote Harrison. First were the student reactions to the people they met. Sophomore Chris D'Amico spoke for the group when he said, "The people there are full of love and dedicated to making the world a better place."¹⁸ Then the reflection periods, especially the sessions on diversity and racism when participants shared their personal experiences with the group, were lively and pointed. "A lot of

people in the group," said Angela Bowden, one of the student leaders, "had either experienced some type of discrimination or had witnessed it." Then she added:

Being able to talk to a group helped people make friendships and also helped them work out problems. Because there were times in the past when they wouldn't trust one another because of the experiences they had, so it was very helpful to have a discussion. There were things that would come up that no one would think about before, and that first discussion helped start the whole week. It made for a lot of thought about why exactly you do what you do, and what positive experiences have helped mold your perspective on things—which is something that was good.¹⁹

Machledt added, "What was interesting was that unlike Community Connections where the freshmen are often very quiet and it's hard to get them to talk, this group you couldn't shut up. They really wanted to talk. They were strong in their opinions and yet I have to say it was a respectful discussion."²⁰

"One of the successes that came out of the experience," noted Machledt, "was the friendships that formed and the sensitivity that occurred among students who would never have really been together other than just to say 'Hi, how are you' or maybe served together on a committee. The fact that we lived together and worked together was very important." Machledt also called attention to the sense of pride that developed among the members of the group as the week progressed. "I think there was a certain pride that they had in the fact that they had been such a diverse group and had gotten along well, and had listened to each other. When you got right down to it, we had four races, four religions, five nationalities represented out of sixteen people. When you put the lacrosse player together with the international student, it's a mixed group." Did the week affect the students' awareness of inner-city issues and the roles that they might play in trying to make a difference in peoples' lives? "A lot of them became a lot more involved because of the experience," said Machledt. "The key piece is allowing them to choose the path they take."²¹

With the second CURTIS Week successfully completed in January 2001, plans now call for making the community service and diversity-focused experience an annual event, held before the start of each spring semester. "There are very few times in a person's life when you can see so much personal growth in a week," said Machledt. "This last CURTIS Week was an example. As one of the girls said, 'It was really challenging, and we grew.'" Looking back on the week, Machledt said, "I didn't think last year's experience could have been better," said Machledt. "But this year's was!"²²

The Health and Wellness Center

Another recent service initiative developed out of a confluence of interests: the University's desire to become more actively engaged in the day-to-day activities of the Bridgeport community, and St. Charles Parish's need to respond to the community health care requirements of its parishioners. With delegations traveling to El Salvador and then to St. Charles with Operation Bridgeport, the feeling was that somehow the University needed to become involved in a long-term service commitment to the people of the East Side, but the form of that commitment remained unclear. For example, members of the Operation Bridgeport planning committee, and especially Sr. Donna Dodge, dreamed of the University purchasing property and developing a University-staffed service presence in the area, not unlike the Jesuit Volunteer Corps—and like many such dreams, the idea would not go away. So when the need for health care services was identified in St. Charles Parish, the idea for a partnership in a Wellness Center was born, an idea supported by St. Charles and the Sacred Heart University administration as well as the heads of several key disciplines, including Dr. Linda Strong, assistant professor of Nursing; Dr. Michael Emery, director of the Physical Therapy Program; Dr. Dori Taylor Sullivan, director of Nursing Programs; and Dr. Patricia Walker, dean of the College of Education and Health Professions.

The current administrator of St. Charles, Fr. Joseph Saba, embraced the idea of creating a Wellness Center. "The area within which I and many others serve," he wrote, "will be truly blessed

by Sacred Heart University committing itself to an additional partnership with us. The students and staff will experience the positive benefits of 'real world' intervention. Everyone becomes a winner. Students will learn first hand about the cultural and ethnic differences which they will inherit. The citizens of the area will receive the assistance they need."²³ Emery recalled Saba saying, "We'll find space for this."

"I think he sensed that a lot of people saw St. Charles as sanctuary," Emery said, "and that they had many needs, including health needs, and he felt they were unprepared to respond to those needs. This could help start to answer some of those questions." At the same time, Emery recalled Saba saying, "I don't want to be the person here at St. Charles leading the parish side of this effort. I'd like to bring in some other key people." So, Emery said, Fr. Saba asked Sally Fernandez, a member of the Parish Council, "to take it on as her project, and she has done an extraordinary job. She brought in five or six people, so now we have what's called a Coordinating Committee for this project. So in a very real sense it's a joint venture."²⁴ Those early discussions, said Dodge, are "probably different than anything we have done because they went to the community and asked the community what it needed."²⁵

A June 27, 2000, "Project Summary Proposal" suggested that the project would begin by identifying an advisory committee, that the Wellness Center could be housed in the Parish Center, and that the services provided "would be based upon a needs assessment that would be conducted by members of the University in cooperation with the Advisory Committee and volunteers from the parish." Initially, according to the proposal, the needs assessment would seek "to identify those needs that are most significant and/or pressing among the community and which cannot be obtained easily elsewhere," and "that services would begin simply with activities such as health screenings, lecture/discussions series on health issues, and wellness and referral activities." Funding would be "sought through various federal, state and private sources through grants applications made by University faculty." And lastly, "personnel for the Center will be provided by the University and will include faculty members, students, and volunteer professionals from the community."²⁶

Each of the key players at the University had specific reasons for supporting the start-up of such a center. When Strong was asked how and why she got involved with the project, her response was "How could I not?" As a member of the second delegation to El Salvador, a member and facilitator of Operation Bridgeport, and a health practitioner long involved in administering to the poor in the Park City, Strong said, "This Center is a direct response to a call for help and partnership from a community comprised of those groups of people most often dismissed and ignored by traditional illness providers." She added, "For me and most other public health professionals this is the type of opportunity we live for—to share our knowledge and skill with others, others that want to share their talents and gifts with you."²⁷

For Emery, involvement in the Wellness Center was "sort of a delayed outgrowth of having the opportunity to travel to El Salvador. Having been there, you end with some real mixed emotions. On the one hand, there's a whole lot to do, and on the other hand you feel pretty impotent being in Fairfield, Connecticut. And then you make the connection that the same sorts of needs exist across town." Emery recalled talking with Strong about a more active University presence at St. Charles. "The College of Education and Health Professions had a focus on health care, and nursing was in a community health mode anyway," Emery said. "So the opportunity to collaborate and do something with a health focus seemed the next natural step of participation that the University could pursue down there."²⁸ The other part of the equation was the situation at St. Charles which reminded Emery of what he had seen in El Salvador. "In El Salvador the church was sort of the pillar of the community," he said. "The parallels began to become apparent, and that was very exciting."²⁹

Walker attended a conference in the spring of 2000 sponsored by the Coalition for Community-Campus Partnerships in Health, which, she said, had "expanded its focus to facilitate the development of other community-based efforts within health professions schools." The St. Charles project, said Walker, offered "an opportunity for the college to contribute to this priority by

developing a model for a community-campus partnership that balances the needs of the community for health and wellness programs with the needs of the college for community-based service, research, and teaching." Calling the Wellness Center an "exciting project," Walker said it will "allow us to expand our network with community-based health providers in Bridgeport."³⁰

Dori Taylor Sullivan, recently appointed as the director of Nursing Programs, explained that she was excited about the St. Charles initiative because "it fits so well with the mission of Sacred Heart," and helped her to remember "why we became nurses." Over the years, she said, "I have grown extremely interested in what has been called the 'healthy communities' effort." Taylor Sullivan also pointed to the "fit" between the needs of St. Charles and the strengths of the nursing program. "We have a very active faculty," she said, "and this fits very naturally with what we are doing. It's just a great opportunity for us."³¹

But before the Center could become a reality, two actions were necessary: first, forming committees—a Coordinating Committee in the parish, and a Community/University Advisory Committee representing the University, St. Charles Parish, and the larger community; and second, writing grants for funding. The Coordinating Committee, which began its work in September 2000 by surveying the health needs of parishioners, was made up of representatives from the Parish Pastoral Life Committee and members of the cultural communities in the parish. By August, a "Community/University Advisory Committee" was planned, "to assist the project directors and staff in their efforts to achieve the service, education, and scholarship goals of the project," and to help "secure funding for the project."³²

The first grant proposal was forwarded to the Council of Independent Colleges in Washington, D.C., the second to The Inner-City Foundation for Charity & Education, and a third to the Helene Fold Health Trust. "The CIC grant looked at student training with an interest in connecting students to the community," said Emery. "The Inner-City Foundation grant focuses more on the service provision. They were two complementary pieces. The Helene Fold Health Trust grant focuses on the role of nursing in community health and the

involvement of student nurses in that effort.”³³ The grants, Emery said, “would help to speed the development of the Center by providing some equipment, some rent for the church to give them a little help, and would provide for employing physicians on a part-time basis. But even if those funds don’t come through,” Emery added, “the commitment to this project has already started in the University and the church. It just means that it will take a little longer.”³⁴

All three grant proposals, drawing upon aims identified in the earlier “Project Proposal Summary,” listed the following as activities for the Center:

1. Identify and address health and wellness needs of people living in and around the community of St. Charles, Bridgeport, Connecticut.
2. Provide a service-based learning environment for students of nursing, occupational therapy and physical therapy at Sacred Heart University.
3. Develop a model of community-based partnership that balances the needs of the community with the needs of the institution for community-based service, research, and teaching into scholarship.
4. Further develop the relationship between the University and the St. Charles Parish community for the betterment of each.³⁵

Components of the project would include “training of community volunteers; needs assessments to determine community health needs, interests, and service gaps; service-learning courses for health professions students; health screening, health education seminars, and other wellness activities.”³⁶

“All of our curricula,” said Emery, “have components of community health education, so this isn’t just a Center that would be focused on providing services. It would also be focused on providing health education.” Moreover, the Center would give Sacred Heart students “the opportunity to see health care needs in a different cultural context, which is pretty hard to do,” Emery said. “Our students go to Yale-New Haven, Hartford Hospital,

Gaylord, and it's really hard for them to see a lot of diversity in terms of people's cultural backgrounds." At St. Charles, with the ethnic mix of parishioners and others in the area, students would confront issues of poverty, diversity, and different cultural heritages on a daily basis. "The people of St. Charles have been excited about this," Emery explained, "because it was presented to them as: What can you teach our students? What would you want them to know as new nurses or as new physical therapists in the field to understand and provide health care services to you best? So they feel very good about that."³⁷

The Wellness Center, responding to needs in St. Charles Parish, promises a partnership that introduces new levels of student and faculty service to the community, while representing a major step toward further institutionalizing Sacred Heart University's mission statement. "It's what had been hoped for from the Operation Bridgeport visits," said Dodge. "It's an evolution of what happens when people are changed and affected," she added.³⁸ The Center, concluded Bertsch, "provides an internship experience for our students, and it gives us a wonderful way to serve the neighborhood."³⁹ And as Emery pointed out, an increased University presence at St. Charles may lead to other initiatives. "Whether it is health or education," he said, "I think the fact that we're at the next level of interaction with them is going to open a whole lot of other doors."⁴⁰

One of those other doors has already opened.

English as a Second Language at St. Charles

The door that opened was a project close to the heart of Fr. Gustavo Falla, the parochial vicar of St. Charles. He knew from the parishioners that there was a real need for tutoring in English as a second language, and when Jim Minor, the director of the English as a Second Language Program at the University, contacted Fr. Gustavo, a plan for instituting a program at St. Charles began to take shape. "They didn't know when they could do it," said Minor, "or whether we could coordinate the times. They didn't want to go to the Adult Education Center in Bridgeport. They wanted to do something right there."⁴¹ So the first step was

to circulate a questionnaire to find out if enough people were interested in learning English to justify starting a class at St. Charles. The questionnaire results were positive, and Fr. Gustavo invited Minor to attend a meeting to talk to the interested parties.

"The first night I went it was kind of rainy and cold and we didn't expect many people," said Minor, recalling the initial meeting. But much to his surprise, "about fifty people showed up, and they all filled out applications. A number of them paid the small fee as a commitment, and that got the ball rolling." From that point on, Minor busied himself with planning the program. "The following week we decided to do a four-week course," he said. "By the first night, we had something like twenty-seven people who were committed and paid, and so I had one teacher." But as the night for the first class arrived, Minor and his teacher were in for a surprise. "I met the teacher down at St. Charles with Fr. Gustavo, and seventy people showed up," he said. "The room was jam-packed, standing room only, like sardines in the downstairs rectory. I looked at the teacher, and the teacher said, 'I'm scared.' We were expecting maybe thirty." Immediately, Minor went searching for another teacher to meet the demand. "Thank God I was able to acquire another teacher to start the following week," he said. "And we were off and running. We had two courses for seventy people."⁴²

As it turned out, the first four-week session ended before the Christmas holidays, and once the specific needs of the parishioners were more clear, Minor said, the curriculum was readjusted. "A good number of them are functioning at a very basic level—so that's survival English," he said. "They have been pretty much disenfranchised from American culture because of that, so we want to give them a way into American life. That's literacy and life skills. We also have some people who are more advanced who are possibly interested in going to college, or at least developing their skills so they can advance in their careers. So we have a variety of needs and now we are sorting them out."⁴³

For the spring 2001 semester, three levels of English as a Second Language were being offered on the Sacred Heart campus. "Fr. Gustavo had seventy people sign up," Minor said. "Either he's a great salesperson, or there's a tremendous need. It's probably

both," he added. "I'm amazed that so many could come. The classes meet from 7:45 to 9:45 in the evening, which again shows the level of commitment on the part of the students. Also Fr. Saba has expressed interest in assisting one of the classes."⁴⁴

Minor also mentioned three other initiatives now in operation. "We started the ESL program for Hispanic adults from St. Mary's in Greenwich," said Minor, "and there's another group in Stamford that we are starting." Beyond the language courses, Minor added, "if any of them want to go on to the University, we have another program here and we can really pursue a degree in a very cost-effective way in the Hispanic Adult Achievers program."⁴⁵

CHAPTER EIGHT

Coming Full Circle

In 1963, when Sacred Heart University first opened its doors, Bishop Curtis and Dr. Conley, the founders, envisioned a school dedicated to graduating young Catholic women and men knowledgeable in faith and committed to social action and social justice. So in retrospect it seems reasonable to suggest that the impetus for many of the volunteer efforts at the University over the years can be traced back to the founders' vision. And now, in keeping with that rich legacy of social action, two of the most recent initiatives—a new scholars' program that weds the best of service-learning to rigorous academic studies based on Catholic social thought, and a special return visit to El Salvador—bring the University's experience with service back full circle to its roots.

The Catholic Social Thought Scholars Program

The Catholic Social Thought Scholars program, an interdisciplinary three-year learning experience, combines the "study of the Catholic Church's social teaching with a field placement in the community," and culminates in a "research project designed to address a particular social justice issue."¹ Dr. Reid, the director of the program, explained that "the University of Notre Dame in Indiana received a grant from a foundation to encourage the teaching of Catholic social thought in colleges and universities, and the idea was to solicit proposals from colleges and universities

that wanted to be part of this." On our campus, the grant caught the attention of several administrators who believed that Sacred Heart University, because of its success with service-learning and its emphasis on Catholic social thought, was uniquely positioned to qualify. "I think Donna [Dodge], Eilene [Bertsch], and Margaret [Palliser] were the people who got it started," said Reid. "It wouldn't have happened without them. They invited a number of faculty members and staff people to sit down and come up with ideas. The group got together periodically and whatever discussion there was, Margaret would type it up, refine it, then send it back to us for a response. So it was a collaboration."² Palliser recalled that one of the initial questions posed by the group was how to integrate the academic components of Catholic intellectual thinking into the program. "Catholic intellectual thinking, in light of our mission and the social teaching of the Church," she said, "would be the ideal piece. If you look at the programs we have, everything is already in place and happening, and this program tied in with Christian leadership but gave it a more specific academic focus."³

Notre Dame "selected a dozen or so of the applicants whose programs looked promising," Reid said, including the proposal from Sacred Heart University. "The idea was that these dozen or so schools would then begin to develop a program to encourage the teaching of Catholic social thought on their campuses. Then the proposals from each university would be presented, critiqued, contacts would be made, and there would be a support network for doing whatever the project involved. At the end of the first year all the representatives of the schools would be brought back together again to report on progress and to continue making contacts."⁴

"The Sacred Heart proposal was very unique," said Reid. "Our program, unlike the other ones, was not aimed at doing something with the core, or encouraging faculty throughout the university to think about infusing Catholic social thought in some way into a lesson plan or a course."⁵ Our program calls for "a pedagogical methodology that is permeated by theological reflection," which in turn would allow students to "encounter a living Tradition that will speak to the social problems they encounter in their

fieldwork." The proposal announced this is "a program for persons who want to change the world!"⁶

The plan calls for fifteen students each year "to participate in a fully integrated faith and justice educational program with eight major components":

- Weekend immersion experience in Bridgeport accompanied by Community Service Field Placement with bi-weekly seminars.
- Two-semester (six credits) interdisciplinary course organized around the Church's social teachings and related social justice themes.
- Catholic Social Thought Visiting Scholar.
- Theological Reflection: Methodology and Praxis.
- "Policy Plunge" week in Washington, D.C., including meetings with organizations that exemplify CST [Catholic social thought] and social action (e.g., Network, Catholic Relief Services, etc.)
- Internship Year (optional).
- Capstone Course/Research Project (three credits).
- Supervised experience in mentoring freshman CST Scholars.⁷

"When we found out our proposal had been accepted," said Reid, "I was asked if I would coordinate the first year of the program, trying to recruit students. So I went around talking about the program with various groups, and then I received recommendations from people. I had about thirty or so names recommended to me, and I contacted the students, spoke with them, and invited them to a session where we talked about the program. Out of that group we had some students who applied, and now we have sixteen people accepted into the program."⁸

According to the program's guidelines, each group of incoming students is subject to a probationary period "to see if they are really going to be able to commit themselves, to see if they can manage the work well," said Noelle D'Agostino, from Campus Ministry. After participating in an immersion experience in Bridgeport, the students "identify social issues that they are going

to focus on, and then learn what the church teaches about those issues,"⁹ said D'Agostino. It's "more of a seminar approach," added Machledt. "It's a program based on service-learning in the broadest sense, and very much tied to Catholic thought."¹⁰

Once the students select a social justice issue to study—"a Criminal Justice major may choose to focus on justice in our prison system and work as a volunteer in the local jail; a Social Work major interested in women's issues may work at a battered women's shelter; an Economics major interested in welfare reform may choose a placement at a local social service agency"—they meet bi-weekly to discuss their on-site experiences and reflect on social justice themes. At the end of the first year "candidates who successfully complete the requirements will become Catholic Social Thought Scholars and will be awarded scholarships of \$1,000 per semester for each semester they participate in the program."¹¹

During the fall of the second year the scholars enroll in a six-credit, two-semester colloquium that explores key Church themes, such as "option for the poor, the dignity of human life, human rights and responsibilities, the principle of the common good, the dignity of work and the rights of workers." At the same time, the students continue fieldwork experiences in the community. "They would start out as freshmen or sophomores," said Machledt, "get their feet wet, find something they enjoy, delve into it more, and then bring that back and tie it to the philosophical underpinnings of Catholicism."¹² Then in the spring of the second year, students and mentors "spend five days in Washington, D.C., studying the relationship between social policy and issues of social justice." That same semester, the scholars begin work on a capstone research project by meeting with a "faculty mentor to identify a specific topic for further research and study, as well as appropriate internship possibilities."¹³

The third and fourth years of the program include the internship placement, the independent research project, and a supervised mentoring experience in the last semester. During the internship placement, the scholar works "with an agency/institution/organization whose work is related to the specific issue/topic that the student has identified for research." Then in the fall of the fourth

year, the scholar is responsible for completing the research project with three major components:

1. A description of the social justice issue being studied and relevant data relating to the topic.
2. In-depth study of the teachings of the Church that inform the issue being analyzed.
3. A realistic proposal for a plan to address the problem.¹⁴

The plan, said Reid, is to involve students in social analysis. "I think one of the objectives of this program," he said, "is not only service and addressing the needs of the poor, but social analysis of the social and economic conditions that create the situations. That's something that is a hope for this program."¹⁵ After completing the research project, the scholars then "assume the role of mentors for the first-year seminar discussion groups." Under the supervision of Reid, the scholars "act as discussion leaders and field placement advisors," and "present their own research to the first-year candidates during the seminar sessions."¹⁶

"I am very excited about this program," said Palliser. "It's something that few people are doing directly. The social teaching of the Church is so integral to the lay person's mission within the Church. For the lay person, it's the transformation of the world. The secular order becomes transformed through the work of the lay person. That is their sphere. So it's perfect. This program speaks directly to it."¹⁷

Coming Full Circle: A Return to El Salvador

"The story has come full circle," said Bertsch. "We began with El Salvador, and we're back there again in response to a call, in the face of a terrible calamity that happened to our friends."¹⁸ The call came to Dodge from Sr. Elena in El Salvador; the calamity was the earthquake that struck that country on January 13, 2001.¹⁹ Elena called to request that the annual spring student delegation—the members of which had already been selected—be postponed because of the demands placed on the rural communities by the

earthquake that measured 7.3 on the Richter scale, left nearly 1,000 dead with some 2,000 people unaccounted for, and turned over a million homes into rubble.²⁰ Instead of the annual student delegation, would it be possible, Elena asked, to send a group of faculty to video the aftermath of the quake, the efforts at rebuilding, and the testimonies of the people? Such a video, it was hoped, would help to solicit aid to rebuild the devastated communities and provide an organizational model for grassroots responses to future crises.

Dodge immediately put out the call to several people, asking if they would be willing to make the quick trip to El Salvador. Dr. McAllister wrote:

Donna Dodge formed an emergency delegation of five faculty, adjuncts, and alumni from those of us with prior familiarity with the communities and individuals involved, the ability to speak fluent Spanish and communicate with people there, and skills in writing and video production. Three of my colleagues on the delegation, Lauren Kempton, Brooks Parmelee, and Terry Neu, have accompanied the student trips, supervised the projects, and know Sister Elena and the families in the communities personally. Another delegate and former student, César Muñoz, made a prior video of a similar community in Calle Real in 1995.

The purpose of the trip was for the delegation to "go down and see exactly what had happened in the community," explained McAllister, "to see whether a student delegation would be feasible a little bit later, and what purpose it would serve. And also whether there were more effective kinds of aid that could be sent down there."²¹ Part of the problem with sending aid in response to a crisis, said Muñoz, is that "aid agencies face the dilemma of how to assist people without stimulating their dependency from outside help, how to aid the country without turning it into a nation of victims."²²

When the University delegation arrived in Tierra Blanca on February 8, it found a community mobilized by Elena and Fr. Pedro de Clerk, the Belgium-born pastor of the town, to deal as

best it could with the devastation. The first night, Elena talked about the role of a neighborhood organization "to establish priorities and decide whose houses in each neighborhood should be rebuilt first," said McAllister. "She explained how they had learned from mistakes trying to distribute aid in the aftermath of hurricane Mitch."²³ Muñoz recalled the organizational efforts as follows: "First, they mobilized members of the parish to make a census of the whole town. Each person covered a block listing its residents and inquiring about land ownership and damages suffered."²⁴ Dr. Neu explained how Elena had set up the tasks: "Each block asked for leaders, for volunteers. They had to go in and take a census of the block. Who lives where? Who owns the property where? How many children are in these houses? How many are from neighboring families? They were trying to sort out how many individuals are affected by this."²⁵ Then, said Muñoz, "Each block elected a 'captain' and every four captains selected one among them as their representative. Thus, seventeen delegates, who had never held any office, met just a few weeks after the earthquake, creating an organization still without a name. Every citizen of Tierra Blanca had participated in the process."²⁶ Neu explained this as "a very massive organizational movement that they have never had before."²⁷

Part of the problem faced by the community stems from the people's unfamiliarity with organizational effort. "The meeting of representatives I later attended," wrote McAllister, "was as much a process of education for the participants involved as a straightforward planning session. Difficult decisions had to be talked over, ideas had to be understood by the villagers in terms that made sense to them. For some, thinking of neighbors or strangers as deserving aid as much as their own family was strange; for others, realizing they had to decide what to do instead of Father Pedro telling them was difficult to understand at first."²⁸ Still another hardship members of the community faced was working to dig out from under the rubble while at the same time trying to eke out a subsistence living. "A lot of these people are trying to carry on working at their current jobs, whether it be in the cane fields or in the *salinas*," said Neu. "Here are these people trying to continue their work, and then coming home to build temporary

shelters, or help their neighbors clear the debris out of the roads so the traffic can get past. So it's an around-the-clock effort."²⁹

McAllister offered this first-person account of some of the second day's activities:

The next day, February 9th, Sister Elena drove us around Tierra Blanca visiting the houses of some of the families whose neighborhood representatives had been designated for aid. César Muñoz and I interviewed and videoed four or five separate families. We saw the extent of the earthquake damage for the first time. Almost every house had collapsed. Often walls were standing, but they had to be demolished as well because they were cracked. Most of the rubble had been cleared off by the time we arrived in Tierra Blanca, and people were living outside where their houses had stood making do with plastic sheets, cardboard, and some tin sheeting from the roofs. We ate lunch and continued visiting and interviewing people laying down lines to begin digging foundations, digging with shovels, breaking the ground with bars and picks, no power tools or machinery. Outside a health clinic that was damaged and open to the sky, empty of any equipment or patients, the woman who was the director told us people continued to fear more earthquakes, and the emotional strain on children was such that any time a loud truck might go by on the street shaking and noisy, children would start crying thinking it another quake. Aftershocks were constant.³⁰

In the face of the disaster, said Neu, the government "is supplying what they call temporary housing, which means a wheelbarrow, a shovel, a pick, and I think they said about ten yards of sheet plastic. That is what they are considering temporary housing. It's actually a kit. Now what are they going to do with that?"³¹

On Sunday, February 11, after Mass at La Virgen de Guadalupe Church in Tierra Blanca, Elena and members of the community held a special celebration of thanksgiving, commending the delegation and "the students of Sacred Heart for coming in the

past and asking about many by name." McAllister wrote, "It was apparent that many students had left a lasting impression among those they visited for only a short time each spring."³² During the celebration, caught on videotape by Muñoz, Elena gave this speech of thanksgiving:

I'd like to say a few words to Sr. Donna Dodge, to the faculty at Sacred Heart University, to the graduates, to the students at the University and to friends. I want you to know that for us it has been a privilege and a great support to feel your solidarity here with us in this moment of crisis. We feel like one family, and we have felt like one family for many, many years. We feel that this relationship is something that is deep in our hearts. When the delegations are not present we remember you, and we remember you because we feel you are about your mission as students from a Catholic university helping people find their dignity. You have supported them economically, but even more important you have become personal friends with them. They feel that they are on an equal basis with you, people to people. And I think that that is a very rich supportive experience.

Elena talked about Sacred Heart University and the people of El Salvador growing together, and said, "It will only happen when human beings—people like you and people like the people from this community come together—people who have an interest, see the need, and say 'I will do what I can.' Hopefully the good work that Sacred Heart University has done here in El Salvador for many years will continue at this time when there is a great need." Then, after specifically asking students and faculty for help to rebuild communities later in July and August, she spoke of the work of the current delegation. "It has not been a vacation," she said. "They have worked very, very hard. But they are taking the message, and they are interviewing, and they are out there visiting people and communities."³³

As it turned out, the fears of the children about recurring earthquakes were not unfounded. The morning the group was

scheduled for the return flight, a 6.6 Richter Scale quake struck the region. "As I was thinking of packing," recalled McAllister,

suddenly I realized that there's this roar like a train and everything is moving and churning. I kind of went into a dream almost. It was sort of like, what's going on here? And then I saw Sr. Elena hurrying past the open door. She said, 'Come on out. Get out.' I got out and we stood under a tree and it just kept going for a long time. It didn't bring anything down where we were. We were kind of on the outer fringes. But by the airport and San Vicente and closer to the capital, entire towns were turned into rubble. Several hundred people lost their lives and then we couldn't get out because the airport was closed.³⁴

Much to the relief of the University community back in Fairfield, the delegation remained safe and returned to campus two days later.

This most recent journey to El Salvador, in response to Elena's call for assistance, provided a continuing testimony of Sacred Heart University's good will toward and solidarity with the people of our adopted sister community in Tierra Blanca. As McAllister wrote of the people in his journal, "Although they appreciate any money or material help we could make available, even more important was that someone from the outside community had come to hear their story and see what had happened to them. Thank you for showing *hermandad*, brotherly and sisterly support for us, they would say."³⁵ Similarly, Kempton said, "Near the end of the trip—maybe the last night—I was helping Elena with the dishes after our supper when an elderly woman, an *abuelita*, came up behind me and kissed my cheek and said 'Buenas.' In that moment, the great importance and power of the service-learning experience became immediate and almost overwhelmingly real for me. I will never forget that unexpected kiss on my cheek."³⁶ So the connection with a community of the poor in Usulután continues; in fact, the University, in recognition of her years of work among the Salvadoran people, bestowed an

honorary doctorate on Sr. Elena at the commencement exercises held on May 20, 2001.

There is no way, I think, that these people—and their brothers and sisters in other Salvadoran communities visited by our many delegations over the years—could comprehend the lasting effect their actions and spirit have had on our University's commitment to live out the implications of its own mission statement. In fact, the spirit of the Salvadoran people lives on in the multitude of the University's social action programs—in the good works of each participant during CURTIS Week, during Community Connections, during Operation Bridgeport, during service-learning courses, in the clinic of the Wellness Center, in the agencies served by the Catholic Social Thought Scholars program, and in the myriad volunteer activities of our sororities, fraternities, and sports teams. It is an enduring legacy.

A Wish List for the Future

To matriculate at Sacred Heart University is to be encouraged to serve. But today there is a difference. More so than at any other time in the history of the school, the drive to institutionalize community service enjoys the attention and support of the highest University administrators. Apart from the students' volunteer efforts that flow from clubs, organizations, and athletic teams, apart from the community service core of the service-learning classes, even apart from the several initiatives outlined in the last two chapters, advocates at the University hope to see service evolve in new and exciting directions. What follows is a wish list of ideas, impressions, and hopes for the future.

- *A Fifth Year Volunteer Experience.* For Donna Dodge, the question is: "What is the responsibility of a University to its community?" One answer would be the realization of a dream shared by Dodge and others to extend the University's presence in Bridgeport. "A dream we have had for a number of years is to offer a fifth-year volunteer experience for students," she said. "We have the students, but we need housing." Eilene Bertsch agreed. "We would have students. I feel very certain about that," she said.

"We talked about a house in Bridgeport for students who are graduating who might wish to do something similar to the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, and do their work for the community out of that house." But, Bertsch said, "without money, we don't have a house. And then we've got to figure out a way to sustain the house once you've got people in it." Dodge recalled thinking about this project while walking through the East Side during an Operation Bridgeport weekend. "It's a neighborhood kind of thing," she said, adding "something will come along."³⁷

- *Service on the Graduate School Level.* For Bertsch, the call to service should extend to the graduate school programs. "While service is institutionalized on an undergraduate level through all our clubs and organizations and residence halls and through many, many different kinds of courses," she said, "I think for it to genuinely take off with the kind of impact it can have on a community of a more structural nature, as opposed to a service nature, it has to move to a graduate level, and be taken over to some extent by colleges." Dodge noted, "We really haven't done too much with our graduate and part-time students. We need more ways to weave that in."

Bertsch recalled attending a meeting in Providence and hearing about the Department of Housing and Urban Development giving out grants. "We must have listened to fifteen different proposals, and they were all coming out of structured graduate programs where the faculty and the students in the department did their teaching and their service work in collaboration with a community."³⁸

"What kind of projects am I thinking about?" asked Bertsch. "I'm thinking about the impact on housing in a neighborhood. Universities were giving low mortgage loans to get faculty to live nearby. Faculty were buying up houses in areas that were surrounding universities." Bertsch then called attention to the Wellness Center initiative, "where a department's activity becomes incorporated in this relationship with the community by creating a new structure. It could be a school. It could be economic development. It could be research on the economic impact of various activities on a neighborhood, run by a management,

finance or economics department. But right now it's course-specific to a person. It's not seen as part of the overall activity of the department. So it's that kind of thing that I think takes service to the next level."³⁹

- *Collaborative Partnering.* "We had a meeting with the Regents the other night," said Bertsch, "and I came out of that very excited about something that we haven't thought of yet, and yet might be the next step for Operation Bridgeport. An executive from People's Bank asked whether or not we had ever thought of making the Operation Bridgeport experience a cooperative or collaborative program between a major corporation—in this case a bank—and our faculty. Executives from People's Bank or GE or Chase would go to St. Charles with us and we would live there together, and then think about what we could do collaboratively." Bertsch added, "It was very exciting, and I thought, there's the next step for Operation Bridgeport. Because then you've got private enterprise, you've got a university, and you've got a community. Then we can talk about the needs."⁴⁰

- *Faculty Scholarship.* For matters of annual review or for promotion and tenure, community service traditionally receives the least attention. But the atmosphere in the past that undervalued community service is slowly being supplanted by the realization that service-learning classes can be a source of scholarship. "It's really taking that service-learning philosophy and practice several steps further," said Dr. Taylor Sullivan. She noted:

I don't think it's the best use of faculty time—I don't mean to be elitist—but I don't think it's the best use of time to go out and volunteer at something. I think we have something different to contribute. We need to look for these opportunities where we don't know as much as we should, and use our research and evaluation and scholarly analytical skills. The range of scholarly activity that's possible is really limitless. How do we best teach and work with students in that environment? What is the reaction to students in those environments? What curricular

changes make a difference and what doesn't? But it does need to be scholarly. I think that that's where we've made the mistake in the past. It's been more service for service's sake, and I think we have a different contribution to make.⁴¹

- *Peace and Justice.* "I would love to have a peace and justice group on this campus," said Noelle D'Agostino. "And something that I might tie into peace and justice is that it is important to support students in moving from service and charity to advocacy. Part of what I envision is working more closely with the Catholic Worker and the Jeremiah House in Bridgeport. Because they are very much tied in to peace and justice issues both at the local and global level. That's their cause. But it's not something I want to force on the students. I want to see if it comes from them first, then help them organize it." For example, D'Agostino pointed to the Pax Christi organization as something she would like to see on campus. "Pax Christi is also an international peace and justice organization," she said, "and Fr. Bob and I were talking about having a chapter at Sacred Heart."⁴² Similarly, Fr. Bob (Fr. Bob Malone, C.S.C., campus minister) talked about starting an Amnesty International group on campus, "to at least get it off the ground somehow. The possibility is there for making a contribution to justice for people that are oppressed, and badly depressed," he added.⁴³

- *Service-Learning.* "If I could wave a magic wand," said Machledt, "I would ask the faculty to be more involved in the daily commitment to service. We need people who are willing to make a commitment to a group, like AIDS or Habitat. There's nothing that beats working alongside the students, because then when they come back to discuss things, you know what they are talking about. You've met the situation. You've seen the person."

Then too, there is the question of how service-learning should be incorporated into the classroom. "We're still way ahead of most schools in service-learning," said Machledt, "but where we fall behind is in evaluation and what the students do in the classroom. You've got the kids out there in Bridgeport. But how much

do you bring the community into your classroom? That has to rest on the faculty's shoulders."⁴⁴

As for offering more service-learning courses, Machledt points out, "if you want to have several hundred more students involved in the program, then you have to have secretarial support and three competent junior, senior, or graduate-level community service assistants working at least twenty-hour weeks. Then I could say, you're in charge of Habitat, and you're in charge of Read Aloud or the schools. I could parcel some of these off and feel that the assistant would be able to handle the issues. They would have a program that they could help design and work through. That's what I would like to see."⁴⁵

• *Recruiting for Service.* "We recruit for athletics," said Dodge. "We recruit students with a real interest in football or baseball or wrestling. We go out and we say we have something special here, and we'd like you to come, and we are going to reward you for that with scholarship money or a grant. We need to do that for students interested in service. We need to recruit them." But these students would not be recruited just to serve, said Bertsch, "but for leadership. You come here and you come on some kind of a work-study or scholarship, and what we promise you is that not only will you have the service experience, you'll have it in such a way that you will become a leader in service."⁴⁶

A Parting Thought

When the Director of Service-Learning and Volunteer Services arrived on campus several years ago, she realized "that most of the volunteer work being done wasn't necessarily in Bridgeport." That changed. "Now I'd say 90 percent of the volunteer work done by the students is done in Bridgeport," said Machledt. "They look for things in Bridgeport now. They've established some relationships with agencies and organizations and that's very positive. More and more students have become involved, and they are saying, 'I'd like to do this.'"

"What makes community service so fulfilling," said Machledt, "is when students begin to realize there is a world out there that

needs their help. There are times," she added, "when a student walks in and talks about a child that he's been tutoring, and it's obvious that our Sacred Heart student has got it. He understands, he cares, and he starts to ask important questions."⁴⁷

Perhaps President Cernera best summed up the University's commitment to make a difference. In his welcoming remarks to students in a recent University undergraduate catalog, he explained that the mission of the school is "to foster a sense of social responsibility and of compassion so that you will be motivated to use your knowledge and talents on behalf of the wider community through service to others, especially the poor."⁴⁸ And in a statement quoted earlier in this story that bears reiterating, he said, "Thousands of students and faculty and staff have been involved in some form of community service. . . : You name it, and we have students and faculty who have done it. There is a genuine concern for the poor."⁴⁹

In fact, community service, in all its manifestations, will continue to be a central part of the mission of the Sacred Heart University. A defining characteristic of the school in its early years, community service remained integral to the University's commitment to social action and social justice during its formative years, and has flowered recently in exciting, innovative ways. The call to service is answered daily in the personal volunteering efforts of the faculty and in the service-learning courses they elect to teach; it permeates the creative thinking of several key administrators on campus; and it continues to attract the hearts, minds, and physical labor of the best of our University's young women and men.

And so the dreams of Sacred Heart University's founders live on . . .

APPENDIX

El Salvador and Operation Bridgeport Delegations

Faculty and Staff Delegations to El Salvador

1992

Gerald Reid, Lauren Kempton, María Teresa Torreira, Thomas Trebon, Louise Spence, Charlotte Gradie, Anne Barker, Dominick Sacco, Scott Willison, Ralph Corrigan, Eilene Bertsch, Robin McAllister, José Ventura

1993

Robin McAllister, Charlotte Gradie, Angel Donohue, Gloria Irizarry, Gerald Reid, Linda Strong, Mitchell Holmes, Katherine Kidd, Ralph Corrigan, Rebecca Abbott

1994

Angeles Dam, Grant Walker, Katherine Kidd, María Teresa Torreira, Peter Gzowski, Mason Cobb, Ed Murray, Judith Miller

1996

Michael McLernon, Anne-Louise Nadeau, Anthony Cernera, Christel Manning, Cathy Raynis, Sandra Weingart, Ralph Corrigan, John Berkman

1997

Michael Emery, Carol Kravitz, Pam Levangie, Antonio Magliaro,
Richard McKinnon, Judy Miller, Christian Morrison, Al Precourt

2001 (Earthquake Delegation)

Lauren Kempton, Robin McAllister, Terry Neu, Brooks Parmelee,
César Muñoz

*Student Delegations to El Salvador
with Faculty/Staff Advisors*

1996

Edith Castro, Eddie Cisneros, Dementred Young, Shelley Lyford,
Greg Botello, Heather Young, Matthew Browning, Brooks
Parmelee, María Teresa Torreira, Phyllis Machledt, John Machledt,
Anita Suess-Kaushik

1997

Zenaïda Vazquez, Tiffany Lozada, Greg Botello, Karen Bagley,
Shelley Lyford, Brian Merwin, Ryan Damboise, Brian Lesnick,
Brooks Parmelee, Ed Murray, María Teresa Torriera

1998

Michelle Day, Melissa Hensley, Kelly Lague, Elizabeth Lento, Kelly
Ann Libby, Christine Maursky, Brian Merwin, Ed Murray, Brooks
Parmelee, Lauren Kempton, Henry Parkinson, Henry Rondon

1999

Marianne Cardo, Michelle Day, Heather Heath, Melissa Hensley,
Jeffrey Hoose, Elizabeth Lento, Kelly Ann Libby, Brian Merwin,
Beth Mitchell, Michael Moylan, Julia Torpey, Debra Ventunelli,

Lauren Kempton, Brooks Parmelee, Jane Neu, Terry Neu, Henry Parkinson

2000

Elizabeth Berard, Heather Heath, Melissa Hensley, Jeffrey Hoose, Elizabeth Lento, Bethany Lescoe, Peter Perreira, Sara Steinnecker, Jeanine Szamreta, Jeremy Tigano, Julia Torpey, Tara Ward, Rachel Neu, Jacob Neu, Terry Neu, Jane Neu, Brooks Parmelee

Operation Bridgeport Delegations

1995

Eilene Bertsch, Anthony Cernera, Ralph Corrigan, Jack de Graffenried, Donna Dodge, Charlotte Gradie, Phyllis Machledt, Christel Manning, Michael McLernon, Pilar Munday, Gerald Reid, Linda Strong

1996

Eilene Bertsch, Anthony Cernera, Ralph Corrigan, Donna Dodge, Patricia Leonard-Pasley, Phyllis Machledt, Cathy Raynis, Lorraine Shea, Melinda Sorenson, Louise Spence, Pan Yatrakis, Pauline Yatrakis

1997

Eilene Bertsch, Marian Calabrese, Ralph Corrigan, Donna Dodge, Anne Marie Fleissner, Virginia Harris, Phyllis Machledt, Paul Madonna, Michael McLernon, Margaret Palliser, Geanne Peloso, Michael Weild, Larry Wielk

1998

Eilene Bertsch, Lisa Boland, Ralph Corrigan, Donna Dodge, Michael Emery, Stephen Lilly, Bridget Lyons, Phyllis Machledt, Antonio Magliaro, Julie Savino, Daniel Shim, Beverlea Tallant

1999 (Spring)

Carol Batt, Laurie Bellico, Eilene Bertsch, Ralph Corrigan, Donna Dodge, Kathy LaFontana, Phyllis Machledt, Theresa Madonna, Jonathan Matte, Matthew Roy, Brian Stiltner, Denise Tiberio

1999 (Fall)

Eilene Bertsch, Ralph Corrigan, Donna Dodge, Jane Gangi, Claudia Henderson, Patricia Leonard-Pasley, Phyllis Machledt, Robin McAllister, Cima Sedigh, Patricia Walker, Sandra Young

2000

Eilene Bertsch, Jeffrey Cain, Jim Castonguay, Nicole Cauvin, Ralph Corrigan, Debra Danowski, Donna Dodge, Phyllis Machledt

Notes

Unless indicated otherwise, all memos, letters, proposals, and other such communications cited below are Sacred Heart University documents, housed in the office of the person who sent or received the item referenced. The location of all class talks, addresses, lectures, and other such events cited below was Sacred Heart University unless indicated otherwise.

Chapter 1

1. *Sacred Heart University Bulletin*, no. 1 (1964): 12.
2. John A. Rycenga, "Project Innovation" (Bridgeport: Sacred Heart University, 1968), 18. "Early in 1967," Dr. Rycenga explained, "as plans were being made for Sacred Heart's first graduation ceremony, the President of the University, Dr. William H. Conley, announced that members of the faculty would undertake, during the 1967-68 academic year, a comprehensive self-study. In the first stages, the study would concern itself with the gathering of data on every facet of the University's operation, past and current. The data, and the analysis which it was to engender, were to provide, finally, a basis for proposals relating to future development and operation of the school. . . . Dr. Conley saw in the self-study a valuable and necessary aid in the accreditation process which the school would shortly be undergoing. . . . *Project Innovation* is that final report, embodying the findings and recommendations produced by a year of work" (1-2). The work of seven faculty committees and Rycenga's report formed the basis for the *Sacred Heart University Self-Evaluation Report for the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education-New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, Inc.*, August 1969.
3. Douglas Bohn, personal interview, July 2000.
4. John Croffy, personal interview with Dr. Herbert Clish, n.d. Dr. Clish, appointed dean of the College on February 1, 1969, interviewed several of the school's founding administrators and faculty, seeking to preserve recollections of the University's beginnings. The typed transcripts are listed under "History" in the Public Relations files.

5. For an overview of the efforts of these two administrators to found the school, see Rycenga, "Project Innovation," 22-25.

6. "Dr. Conley Speaks At First Convocation," *Obelisk*, 3 February 1964, 1.

7. Lisa von York, "Social Action Society Initiates Work in Area," *Obelisk*, 9 November 1966, 4. In the same article she wrote: "To become really involved has been the project of two Sacred Heart students who rented an apartment in the city's West Side last summer. . . . When they moved in they were besieged by small neighborhood children who would drop in at unexpected moments. When it was realized that these children often had nowhere to go due to crowded or troubled home circumstances, and that school would be starting soon, a study center was conceptualized as at least a partial answer to their 'where to go' problems. The store-front library and study center at Our Lady of Providence is now a reality on the West Side. Hundreds of books have been donated and there are volunteers on hand every school day to supervise and help the children." Then von York ended the article by naming several student activists: "Sacred Heart students who may be found at the center on different days of the week are Norma Morales, Keith Nelson, Maureen Dursi, Jan Muldoon, Jack Antedominico, Jack Devine, Jeannie Carpenter, Lucy Spitz, Jay Andradi, Diane McMahon, and Rich Gookin" (6).

8. "Bishop Urges Collegians Toward New Freedom, Responsibility," *Obelisk*, 27 September 1967, 7.

9. "SHU Students Establish Council for Social Action," *Bridgeport Post*, 24 September 1967, E11.

10. "Social Action by Students Stressed By Chaplain at Sacred Heart University," *Bridgeport Sunday Post*, 28 January 1968, B19.

11. "Brains and Service Recognized at SHU," *Obelisk*, 2 May 1968, 2.

12. "Center For Urban Studies Created By Four Universities," *Town Crier*, 27 November 1968, n.p. See "Newspaper Clippings," November 1968-April 1969 in Public Relations files.

13. William B. Kennedy, personal interview, 11 April 2001.

14. John Croffy, personal interview, 20 April 2001.

15. Douglas Bohn, personal interview, 19 April 2001. HECUS programs, said Bohn, included a cross-registration agreement among the schools; a program that pooled the resources of participating institutions to allow students to enroll in less popular foreign language studies; a faculty exchange program; and, in one instance, the purchase of a boat to facilitate the study of the Bridgeport harbor by Dr. Joseph Moran, chair of the Biology Department.

16. Kennedy, personal interview.

17. Avril Westmorland, "SHU Charts Goals for Decades," *Bridgeport Telegram*, 7 February 1970, 4.
18. "Catholic Education," *Obelisk*, 19 February 1970, 3.
19. Douglas Bohn, personal interview, June 2000.
20. Charles Eby and Paul Siff, *History of the First Twenty-Five Years of Sacred Heart University* (Fairfield: Sacred Heart University, 1988), 11.
21. "Introduction," *Sacred Heart University Catalog* (1972). The catalog was published under the general supervision of Dr. Charles Ford, the Academic Vice-President.
22. "SHU Fraternities, Sororities Take Active Role in Community Concerns," *Bridgeport Sunday Post*, 29 November 1970, 19.
23. Sampling of volunteer efforts and sites culled from several issues of the *Prologue* in the 1960s and early 1970s.
24. "20 SHU Students Draw Experience With Field Work at Dinan Center," *Bridgeport Sunday Post*, 26 April 1970, 20.
25. Jack Hickey-Williams, "Thomas Merton House of Hospitality" (Bridgeport: Thomas Merton Center, n.d.).
26. Fr. John Giuliani, personal letter, 22 June 2000.
27. "In Celebration of the 25th Anniversary of The Thomas Merton Center" (Bridgeport: Thomas Merton Center, n.d.).
28. Giuliani, personal letter.
29. Hickey-Williams, "Thomas Merton House of Hospitality."
30. "The Thomas Merton Center" (Bridgeport: Thomas Merton Center, n.d.).
31. Bishop Edward Egan, talk at the Celebrity Breakfast, Bridgeport Holiday Inn, 7 June 2000.
32. Maryann Furlong, personal interview, June 2000.
33. "The Thomas Merton Center."
34. Jan Muldoon, "Muldoon joins volunteers for week in Appalachia," *Obelisk*, 16 May 1966, 7.
35. See *Prologue* (1968).
36. "4th Appalachia Drive Launched by SHU Students," *Bridgeport Sunday Post*, 28 October 1973, A9.
37. *Prologue* (1975).
38. Donald Brodeur, personal interview, 21 February 2001.
39. "REPHAS," *Prologue* (1977).
40. Brodeur, personal interview.
41. "SHU to Commend 20 for Community Service," *Bridgeport Sunday Post*, 5 June 1983, D8.
42. Thomas P. Melady, "This Generation is More Acquisitive: It is also Idealistic," *Southern Connecticut Newspapers, Inc.*, 7 April 1985, A19.

43. Thomas P. Melady, "The Idea of a Catholic University," *Catholic Transcript*, 8 April 1983, 5.

44. Thomas P. Melady, "Empowering the Urban Underclass: Our Major Domestic Challenge," *Catholicism in Crisis* (January 1985): 31.

45. Melissa Muller, "SHU Program Bridges Gap for Students," *Bridgeport Sunday Post*, 26 July 1987, C4.

46. "SHU To Sponsor 'Bridge,' a Six-Week Summer Remedial Enrichment Program for Bridgeport High School Students," Office of Public Information, 3 March 1986, 2.

47. Felipe Reinoso was awarded the "President's Service Award" in Washington, D.C. by President Clinton in October 1999. This is the highest honor given by the President for volunteer service.

48. Felipe Reinoso, personal interview, 25 July 2000.

49. Quoted in Don Harrison, "An Award from the President," *Sacred Heart University* (summer 2000): 28.

50. Todd Capute, "SHU Takes Initiative with Pupils," *Bridgeport Post*, 29 October 1991, B4.

51. Marian Calabrese, personal interview, July 2000.

Chapter 2

1. Anthony J. Cernera, Inauguration address at Sacred Heart University," 15 October 1988.

2. *Academic Catalog* (1985-87), 5.

3. *Academic Catalog* (1987-89), 7.

4. "Sacred Heart University 1993 Self-Study," 1, no. 1 (1993). Years later in a talk to undergraduates, Cernera reflected on the significance of the mission statement and his role in making it central to the life of the University: "One of the most important things that a president of an organization does—the president of a college or university—is to articulate the mission and the vision, and then the goals and objectives of the institution. And to remind the institution about where we are going, and about how we are going to get there, and to keep putting in front of us our highest ideals" (class talk, 23 March 1999).

5. *Sacred Heart University Undergraduate Catalog* (1989-91), 7.

6. Sr. Donna Dodge, campus e-mail, 27 July 2000.

7. Dodge, campus e-mail.

8. Dodge, campus e-mail.

9. Fr. T. Michael McLernon, class talk, 17 March 1998.

10. Anthony J. Cernera, class talk.

11. Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, quoted in Rubén Zamora,

"Responsibility of Resurrection: We Hold Romero's Life in Our Hands," *Challenge* 5, no. 2 (summer 1995): 3.

12. Zamora, "Responsibility of Resurrection," 3.

13. Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez, "Solidarity: The Victory of Life," *Challenge* 5, no. 2 (summer 1995): 1.

14. Joseph Grau, "Introduction" to Daniel Berrigan, "Romero's Hope," *Sacred Heart University Review* 10, no. 1 (fall 1989): 3.

15. "El Salvador Subject of Poetry Reading at SHU," Office of University Relations, February 1983.

16. Berrigan, "Romero's Hope," 6.

17. Berrigan, "Romero's Hope," 7.

18. Berrigan, "Romero's Hope," 4-5.

19. José María Tojeira, S.J., "El Salvador in Perspective: An Interview with José María Tojeira," *America* 173, no. 15 (November 11, 1995): 10.

20. Dean Brackley, S.J., "Remembering the UCA Martyrs: Ten Years Later," *Conversations* (fall 1999): 8.

21. Brackley, "Remembering the UCA Martyrs," 16.

22. Robin McAllister, "Searching for Truth in a World of Lies," *Sacred Heart University Review* 12, nos. 1 & 2 (fall 1991/spring 1992): 35-36. To add a personal note, the murder of the UCA professors that Professor McAllister described later as unthinkable on the Sacred Heart University campus was a recurring nightmare for me after returning from El Salvador in 1992, suggesting the impressions that a visit to the UCA campus and the site of the murders make on a person's psyche. In this dream faculty and administrators were marched out to the center of the quad, then executed with machine guns in front of the assembled students.

23. Anthony J. Cernera, "Faculty and Administrators in El Salvador: Fulfilling the University's Mission in the World," *Sacred Heart University Review* 16, nos. 1 & 2 (fall 1995/spring 1996): 2.

24. Frank Smyth, "The Truth Will Out," *Village Voice*, 31 July 1990, 19; quoted in Brackley, "Remembering the UCA Martyrs," 10.

25. "Citation" for His Excellency the Most Reverend Arturo Rivera Damas, S.D.B., 17 May 1990.

26. Gerald Reid, "A Proposal for a SHU Faculty Study Tour and Delegation to El Salvador," 30 October 1991.

27. Cernera, "Faculty and Administrators in El Salvador," 2.

Chapter 3

1. Eilene Bertsch, class talk, 9 November 1999.

2. A more complete story of the first and subsequent trips to El

Salvador, what transpired, and the effects of those trips on the participants, remains to be told.

3. Gerald Reid, campus e-mail, 15 August 2000.

4. Bertsch, class talk.

5. Fr. David Blanchard, group talk at Casa Clementina, San Salvador, El Salvador, 14 June 1992. A communiqué released on October 22 by the Brigada Maximiliano Hernández Martínez death squad suggests the tense situation at that time: "Since the signing of the nefarious and unconstitutional Mexico accords with the terrorists of the FMLN, inconceivable acts have occurred in our beloved country. . . . The country has been invaded by pseudo-communist foreigners. . . . Come October 31 we will proceed to accomplish a death sentence on all the terrorists. . . . Also we state that the white pestilence of ONUSAL must leave, and so too the foreign journalists . . . and all those who collaborate with the terrorists" ("El Salvador," *Centroamerica: The Month in Review* 7, no. 11 [November 1992]: 2).

6. Minor Sinclair, "The Visit of an Academic Mission to El Salvador: The Prospects—A Report to Sacred Heart University," Washington, D.C.: Ecumenical Program on Central America and the Caribbean, 9 April 1992.

7. Frank Mastroianni, "SHU Sponsoring Delegation to El Salvador," *Spectrum*, 9 April 1992, 2.

8. Gerald F. Reid, "Notes on El Salvador," *Sacred Heart University Review* 12, nos. 1 & 2 (fall 1991/spring 1992): 3.

9. Anthony J. Cerner, "Faculty and Administrators in El Salvador," 5.

10. Jennifer Casolo, talk to the SHU delegation, spring 1992.

11. Eilene Bertsch, "Beyond Death and Destruction—Faith and Hope," *Sacred Heart University Review* 12, nos. 1 & 2 (fall 1991/spring 1992): 5.

12. Robin McAllister, "Searching for Truth in a World of Lies," 34.

13. David Blanchard, talk to SHU delegation, 16 October 1991.

14. Mirna Anaya, meeting with SHU delegation, San Salvador, 12 June 1992.

15. Anaya, meeting with SHU delegation.

16. "Five Killed, Mirna Anaya Attacked," *Centroamerica: The Month in Review*, February 1993.

17. Bertsch, "Beyond Death and Destruction," 5-6.

18. Minor Sinclair, group talk at Nueva Esperanza, El Salvador, 13 June 1992.

19. María Teresa Torreira, "Reflections on California," *Sacred Heart University Review* 12, nos. 1 & 2 (fall 1991/spring 1992): 21.

20. Torreira, "Reflections on California," 22.

21. Bertsch, class talk.

22. Gerald F. Reid, "The Cross of Calle Real," *Sacred Heart University Review* 12, nos. 1 & 2 (fall 1991/spring 1992): 15.

23. Jean Stokan, "Who Are the Terrorists?," *Sacred Heart University Review* 16, nos. 1 & 2 (fall 1995/spring 1996): 31. Jean is the wife of Scott Wright from EPICA, who led a delegation of faculty and administrators to El Salvador in 1996. She offered to submit her poems to be published along with the reflections of other members of the group.

24. Bertsch, class talk. In 1995, Shelley Lyford, a Global Studies major at SHU who participated in student delegations to El Salvador and who studied in that country with Augsburg College, spoke about that same difficulty with understanding the role of the U.S. in the war. "Everyday I learn more about the role the United States plays in this country," she wrote home to her mother. "This is one of the hardest things for me to deal with. We gave the government \$6 billion dollars to destroy the lives of innocent *campesinos* who were fighting for basic rights and justice" (fax to Dr. Katherine Kidd, Global Studies Department, 16 October 1995, 1).

25. Minor Sinclair, "The University that Refused to Die," *Sacred Heart University Review* 12, nos. 1 & 2 (fall 1991/spring 1992): 30.

26. Sinclair, "The University that Refused to Die," 32.

27. Scott Willison, "A Thousand Times Heroic: The Children of El Salvador," *Sacred Heart University Review* 12, nos. 1 & 2 (fall 1991/spring 1992): 18.

28. Thomas J. Trebon, "Listening and Learning: Reflections on Community," *Sacred Heart University Review* 12, nos. 1 & 2 (fall 1991/spring 1992): 11.

29. "Cooperative Agreement between Sacred Heart University and the National University of El Salvador," 8 February 1993.

30. "Citation," Sacred Heart University Special Academic Convocation, 8 March 1993.

31. Anthony J. Cernera, "Special Convocation in Honor of Fabio Castillo Figueroa, M.D.," 8 March 1993.

32. Louise Spence and Rebecca Abbott, memo to Dr. Anthony Cernera, 1 July 1992.

33. "Delegation Visits SHU," *Connecticut Post*, 8 March 1994, B4. Over the ensuing years, the plan to create a mutually beneficial student and faculty exchange with the UES failed to materialize. While faculty delegations continue to visit the UES campus, our main focus shifted to sending student and faculty groups to help with community building in Tierra Blanca (see "Spring Breaks in El Salvador" in chapter 6, particularly note 40).

34. The part of the UCA experience that follows, in keeping with the

thrust of this report, concentrates on Fr. Brackley's discussion of a university education and the role of service. But mention should be made of the impact on the group of the UCA experience—particularly the visit to the Jesuit museum and the photo album detailing the assassinations, the rose garden where the Jesuits fell, and the chapel where life-size artwork celebrates the martyrs. Visiting these sites was wrenching and awe-inspiring, leaving the visitor feeling a numbing physical agony, yet at the same time a sense of extraordinary hope (much like the feelings evoked at the Chapel of the Divine Providence, where Archbishop Romero fell). Eilene Bertsch said it best: "On that brilliant, sunny afternoon at UCA, I was not prepared for the colored photographs of the bruised and mutilated bodies of the eight victims of atrocity. I was not prepared to defend all sensibility against the Michelangelo-like, life-sized drawings of the dead on the walls of the campus chapel. And I began to despair. . . . But I know despair cannot be attributed to the Salvadoran people with whom we met, for their stories do not end in death. Their journey began in the suffering born of ages of injustice, but they have passed through death and destruction to emerge again with renewed faith in God and hope for the future" ("Beyond Death and Destruction," 7).

35. Bertsch, class talk.

36. Dean Brackley, S.J., "The University and the 'Broken Heart' Experience," *Sacred Heart University Review* 13, nos. 1 & 2 (fall 1992/spring 1993): 3. (A transcript of a Fr. Brackley talk given to the second SHU delegation on the UCA campus, July 5, 1993.)

37. Brackley, "The University and the 'Broken Heart' Experience," 5-6.

38. Gerald Reid, memo to Anthony Cernera, 16 August 1993. Brackley was subsequently invited to our campus and spoke on the topic "The Mission of a Catholic University in Today's World" on January 20, 1994.

39. Gerald Reid, memo to SHU El Salvador Delegation, 27 July 1992. Other El Salvador initiatives included a faculty residency for Fullbright Scholar Ricardo Cordova, visits to campus by Kevin Murray and Sr. Elena Jaramillo, a video production for the Cooperativa Epifania in Calle Real by César Muñoz and Marguerite Moranski, a semester-long lecture series by Fr. Blanchard, and the annual Sacred Heart student work trips during Easter Break to Tierra Blanca.

40. Bertsch, class talk.

Chapter 4

1. "You Can Make a Difference," *USA Weekend*, 14-16 August 1992, 8.

2. "Make A Difference Day," memo to the University Community, 5 November 1992.
3. "Sacred Heart University Students Learn Important Lessons by Making a Difference," 17 November 1992, 2.
4. Ginny Apple, "To the University Community," 17 November 1992.
5. Ginny Apple, "Volunteerism," 1 March 1993.
6. Thomas Trebon, "Thirtieth Anniversary Celebration," 6 May 1992.
7. "Summary of meeting on February 11, 1993 Regarding Thirtieth Anniversary," 1.
8. Eilene Bertsch, personal interview, 15 September 2000.
9. Bertsch, personal interview.
10. Eilene Bertsch, class talk, 9 November 1999.
11. Bertsch, personal interview.
12. Anthony J. Cernera, Commencement Address, May 1993.
13. Seth Amgott, "Sacred Heart U. Grads Told Impossible is in Reach," *Sunday Advocate*, 23 May 1993, A5.
14. Bertsch, personal interview.
15. "Employee Requisition: Administration/Staff," 3 August 1993.
16. Bertsch, "'30,000 Hours'—Community Service Project," 2 August 1993.
17. Gail Halapin, "Sacred Heart University: 30,000 Hours Community Service," 6 August 1993.
18. Eilene Bertsch, memo to Campo, "Mission Statement," 9 August 1993.
19. Mike Campo, "Thirty Thousand Hours."
20. The following agencies participated in the Service Fair: Boys/Girls Club of Bridgeport, MAACS, Bridge House, YMCA of Bridgeport, Junior Achievement, Danbury Volunteer Bureau, Project Learn, Child Health Project, Mercy Learning Center, Lower Fairfield Center, Literacy Volunteers of America, Habitat for Humanity, Thomas Merton House, McKinney Foundation, Lord Chamberlain Nursing Home, Bread and Roses, Ella Grasso Center, and the March of Dimes.
21. Cheryl Yost, "SHU celebrates 30th Anniversary with Pledge of Service," *Connecticut Post*, 15 September 1993, A3.
22. Chris Nicholson, "30,000 Hour Journey Kicks Off," *Spectrum*, 16 September 1993, 1.
23. "30,000 Hours of Service is SHU Goal," *Fairfield Citizen-News*, 8 October 1993, A29.
24. Kelly Phillips, "Successful Service Fair Starts the New Semester," *Spectrum*, 16 September 1993, 6.
25. Gail Halapin, personal interview, 25 April 2001.
26. Cathy Swenson, memo to Sacred Heart department chairpersons, n.d.

27. See "Computer Printout of 30,000 Hours Logged," 9.

28. Sarah Gauthier, "El Salvador Changes Student's Perspective," *Spectrum*, 7 October 1993, 7.

29. Gauthier, "El Salvador Changes," 7.

30. "30,000 Hours," flyer, 1993. A second, more comprehensive flyer with the title "Keeping the Promise," featured the service statement from the school's mission statement, a note from the President, several on-site volunteer possibilities, a note from Halapin, and a clip off section for the volunteer to list service preferences.

31. Sarah Gauthier, "Students Participate in Habitat for Humanity," *Spectrum*, 7 October 1993, 7.

32. Anthony J. Cerna, letter to Catherine R. Stimpson, 16 November 1993.

33. Also honored at the event were The Most Rev. Walter W. Curtis, retired Bishop of Bridgeport; John Croffy, the school's first dean of students; James R. Kerr, one of the school's original trustees; and Ralph L. Rossi, a trustee.

34. "Gala marks SHU's 30th Anniversary," *Fairfield Citizen-News*, 13 October 1993, 34.

35. Nancy Mandell, memo, "Community Service Update," State of Connecticut: Department of Higher Education, 12 November 1993.

36. Sarah Gauthier, "Saturday Bike-a-thon Part of 30,000 Hours Program," *Spectrum*, 21 October 1993, 7. The trip logged a modest ninety-three hours for the program.

37. Halapin, personal interview.

38. Marian Calabrese, personal interview, 26 April 2001. "So as not to put pressure on anybody," Calabrese said, "we encouraged the students to go as far as they wanted to go. Each person must do it in his or her own way. The only thing I insisted on was that anyone who worked on a quilt—whether cutting, sewing, basting, or hemming—signed the back. Every quilt that went out was signed. And as it went along, sayings and writings were incorporated. Whatever the students wanted to put on the quilts, they could."

39. "Sacred Heart's Leader Geared to Social Responsibility," *Westport News*, 21 December 1993, B6.

40. Sarah Gauthier, "Students Volunteer for Merton House," *Spectrum*, 4 November 1993, 12.

41. Martha Miller Byrnes, "Countdown to 30,000 Hours: University Community Embraces Service Projects," *Focus* (winter 1994): 1.

42. "We're Zeroing in on 30,000," *Focus* (winter 1994): 4.

43. Sarah Gauthier, "30,000 Hour Project Serves Silent Voices,"

Spectrum, 9 December 1993, 11. Halapin reported that the Holiday season helped the cause. "We were stalled at 4,000 hours in November and 30,000 seemed far away," said Halapin. "But during the holidays people do a lot more giving and the volunteers started giving more of their time" ("Sacred Heart University Nears its 30th Anniversary Goal," news release, 27 January 1994, 1).

44. Mark Nacinovich, "SHU Celebrates Anniversary by Giving," *Catholic Transcript*, 11 March 1994, 8.

45. Nacinovich, "SHU Celebrates Anniversary by Giving," 8. A few years earlier, the Big Brothers/Big Sisters organization honored Scott Colvin, a Sacred Heart University professor of accounting, naming him Fairfield County's Big Brother of the Year for his work with a Bridgeport youth.

46. Justin Maffeo, "University of El Salvador Delegates Visit Campus," *Spectrum*, 3 March 1994, 1.

47. Bertsch, personal interview.

48. "University Exceeds Goal for Community Service," *Fairfield Citizen-News*, 30 March 1994, 18.

49. "Sacred Heart Displays its Volunteer Heart," *Connecticut Post*, 26 March 1994, A2.

50. Halapin, personal interview.

51. "Sacred Heart Athletes Volunteer Time to Community," *Fairfield Citizen-News*, 27 April 1994, 21.

52. Andrew G. De Rocco, "Dear Award Nominees in Connecticut Higher Education Community Service Awards: 1994," 14 April 1994.

53. Also at the ceremonies, Sacred Heart University senior Peter Rosaspina was among the nominees for an "Individual Student Award."

54. One of Halapin's last tasks as the 30,000-hour coordinator was to put together a sourcebook listing a "broad array of service organizations, activities, and resources." The directory was designed "to encourage the student's interest in and access to the social, cultural, and educational offerings of service in our area" (*Community Service Sourcebook*, June 1994).

55. See "Sacred Heart Athletes Volunteer Time to Community."

Chapter 5

1. Eilene Bertsch, "Proposal Abstract: Learning and Service at Sacred Heart University," 27 January 1994. (Forwarded to the Learning and Service Alliance, Council of Independent Colleges, Washington, D.C. The CIC is an international association of colleges and universities that serves as a resource of ideas for educational reform.)

2. Bertsch, "Narrative: Learning and Service at Sacred Heart University," in "CIC Grant Proposal," 1-2.

3. Bertsch, "Narrative," 2-3.

4. Bertsch, "Narrative," 4.

5. Anthony J. Cernera, letter to Dr. Allen P. Splete, 27 January 1994.

6. Thomas J. Trebon, letter to Dr. Allen P. Splete.

7. Steve Pelletier, "Thirty Colleges Are Awarded Grants in Service-Learning Project," news release, CIC, Washington, D.C., 1 April 1994, 1.

8. "Education for Real," in *Service-Learning: Education for Real*. Partnership for Service-Learning: Washington, D.C., 25-27 February 1994, 4.

9. "Education for Real," 5.

10. Ann Watters and Marjorie Ford, *A Guide for Change: Resources for Implementing Community Service Writing* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1995), xi-xii.

11. Ralph Corrigan, "The Voice of Students in Service-Learning," in Robert L. Sigmon, ed., *Journey to Service-Learning: Experiences from Independent Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities* (Washington, D.C.: Council of Independent Colleges, 1996), 67.

12. Eilene Bertsch, campus e-mail, 24 October 2000.

13. Eilene Bertsch and Sr. Margaret Palliser, letter to "Dear Colleagues," 14 June 1994.

14. Eilene Bertsch, class talk, 9 November 1999.

15. Bertsch, personal interview, 16 October 2000.

16. The task force was divided into two groups: the "Academic" included John Berkman, Marian Calabrese, Nicole Cauvin, Ralph Corrigan, Lauren Kempton, Claire Marrone and John Roney; and the "Nature and Composition" with Alvin Clinkscales, Elaine Davis, Mike Devine, Steve Harrison, Gerald Reid, Barbara Tulley, plus two student groups and a resident assistant.

17. "Tasks of the Service-Learning Taskforce, 1994-95." Fairfield: Sacred Heart University, 21 June 1994.

18. "Tasks of the Service-Learning Taskforce, 1994-95."

19. Claire Marrone, memo to Eilene Bertsch, 6 September 1994.

20. Phyllis Machledt, "Service-Learning Report," March 1995, 7.

21. Denise Matthews, "Roney Promotes History, Service at S.H.U." *Spectrum*, 17 November 1994, 12.

22. Phyllis Machledt, personal interview, 18 October 2000.

23. Machledt, personal interview.

24. Machledt, "Service-Learning Report," 12.

25. Machledt, "Service-Learning Report," 12.

26. Machledt, "Service-Learning Report," 1.

27. Machledt, "Service-Learning Report," 2.

28. Machledt, "Service-Learning Report," 2.

29. Machledt, "Service-Learning Report," 2.

30. The following service-learning courses were offered in the spring: Multi-Cultural Education; Intermediate Spanish; Princes to Peasants; Methods of Teaching Sciences, Social Sciences, and Health; Business Communications; Latin American Twentieth Century History; Rhetoric: the Longer Forms; Newspaper Production; American Sign Language; and Effective Communications. At the same time, one student worked on a Global Studies Internship, and a Media Studies student completed a video on "Youth Rebuild."

31. Machledt, "Service-Learning Report," 3-4.

32. Machledt, "Service-Learning Report," 4.

33. Donna Dodge, quoted in "On Bridgeport and Service-Learning," in *Touching People's Lives: A Service-Learning Reader*, ed. Ralph Corrigan (Fairfield: Sacred Heart University, 1999), 53.

34. Machledt, "Service-Learning Report," 12.

35. That goal became a reality August 7, 1995 when Machledt was hired by the University under the new title of Director of Service-Learning and Volunteer Services.

36. The delegation included administrators Donna Dodge, Eilene Bertsch, and Phyllis Machledt; community agency representative Beverly Salzman; SHU student Valerie Vancza; and faculty members Pilar Munday and Ralph Corrigan.

37. William Clinton, letter, 6 April 1995.

38. Allen P. Splete, "Greetings," in *Serving to Learn, Learning to Serve*. National Institute on Learning and Service (St. Charles, Ill.: Council of Independent Colleges, 1995).

39. As part of this story, it should be noted that Eilene Bertsch was asked to fill in for Ralph Nader, who was to deliver the closing address at the conference on Saturday. Nader was experiencing travel difficulties. Bertsch stayed up all night preparing a closing speech only to have Nader arrive at the last moment.

40. See "Preliminary Planning Worksheet: Sacred Heart University." The worksheet also called for several improvements. For example, it noted many faculty lacked awareness of the possibilities of service-learning, and issues of faculty feeling overburdened needed to be addressed. It also recommended that faculty needed to be more directly involved with the agencies where their students worked. On the administrative side, service-learning courses needed to be designated early in the registration process. As for the agencies, they could develop more

realistic expectations of what students might be expected to accomplish in a semester.

41. Phyllis Machledt, "Service-Learning at Sacred Heart University: CIC Grant Final Report," 22 November 1995, 5.

42. Machledt, "Service-Learning at Sacred Heart University: CIC Grant Final Report," 6.

Chapter 6

1. "Greetings to the Delegates," St. Charles Urban Retreat Center, 22 September 1995.

2. Quoted in Serge Mihaly, "Practicing What They Preach: University Reaches Out to Bridgeport," *Sacred Heart University* (winter 1996): 20.

3. Robin Denaro, "Gritty Taste of Life: Sacred Heart Volunteers Seek Hands-On Sense of East Side Needs," *Connecticut Post*, 25 September 1995, A10.

4. Donna Dodge, quoted in Denaro, "Gritty Taste of Life," A10.

5. Robert L. Sigmon, "Sit Down. Be Quiet. Pay Attention," *NESEE Quarterly* (spring 1995): 31.

6. Eilene Bertsch, class talk, 9 November 1999.

7. Although the group was told that the gunfire in the streets had calmed down, that night around the corner from St. Charles several gunshots rang out.

8. Jackie Fitzpatrick, "Doors Slowly Open in an Area Under Seige," *New York Times*, 4 June 1995, CN4.

9. Karen Daden, personal testimony, St. Charles Urban Center, 23 September 1995. Daden, a former military intelligence officer, was instrumental in organizing the community fight to regain control of the streets.

10. Jackie Polanco, personal testimony, St. Charles Urban Center, 23 September 1995.

11. Jorge Jaiman, personal testimony, St. Charles Urban Center, 23 September 1995. Jaiman and Karen Daden shared the stories of their involvement with the rebirth of East Side at length with the delegation. Jaiman talked about how in the beginning they saw "total devastation. People were afraid to talk to us. They were afraid to communicate with each other. And they were definitely afraid of retaliation from the gangs." He said, "Karen was threatened by the gangs. Her house was machine-gunned. Death notices were put out for Karen, officers Mike Sample and Jorge Reyes, and myself." Daden added, "First let me say that you have

entered the Third World. . . . Look in your own backyard ladies and gentlemen. This is the Third World." Jaiman then noted, "What we are doing is perpetrating a system that consistently abuses and uses people. And I don't think, at this point, that what we need is money. I think what we need is resources to educate, to train, and to mobilize people. Human resources."

12. Donna Dodge, memo to participants in Operation Bridgeport, 27 November 1995.

13. Dodge, memo to participants in Operation Bridgeport.

14. Anthony Cerna, letter to David Carson, 18 August 1995.

15. Two of the proposed projects were implemented during the spring semester. The first, a four-part series of leadership seminars hosted by Cerna at the University, brought area grassroots leaders together with Sacred Heart presenters who shared strategies for organizing effective community organizations, developing mission statements, writing grant proposals, and developing leadership communication skills. The second project, under the guidance of Jack de Graffenried, brought a select group of promising urban high school artists to campus for a summer drawing workshop, where student artists received intensive instruction, culminating in an art competition. "I offered to teach drawing to a group of students from the three Bridgeport high schools," said de Graffenried, "and that subsequently led to an art exhibit. We also invited the other schools in the immediate Greater Bridgeport area. We had grant money for awards, and for pieces of the art work to be framed that got accepted by an outside jury of professional artists. In the last three years students from Shelton, Trumbull, and Fairfield have been invited to sit in on the class, so the class became naturally integrated from both urban and suburban schools. It's been flying for five years" (Jack de Graffenried, personal interview, 30 November 2000).

16. Phyllis Machledt, memo, "Operation Bridgeport: A Faculty/Staff Urban Weekend," n.d.

17. Don Harrison, "Opening Doors," *Sacred Heart University* (spring 1995): 19.

18. Phyllis Machledt, personal interview, 30 November 2000.

19. Quoted in Danielle Nolan, "SHU's Habitat for Humanity Works so More Will Live Decently," *Spectrum*, 5 October 1995, 7.

20. Quoted in "SHU's Habitat for Humanity," 7.

21. Quoted in Harrison, "Opening Doors," 19.

22. John Roney, campus e-mail, 4 December 2000.

23. Phyllis Machledt, personal interview, 30 November 2000.

24. Sarah Hanna and Jessica York, "Students extend help in

Baltimore," *Spectrum*, 20 March 1997, 2. The first group to travel to Baltimore included Campus Habitat officers Lourdes González, President; Wayne Kruger, Vice-President; Sean Otterspoor, Secretary; Patricia Kurowski, Treasurer; and members Shawn Avery, Josue Chevalier, Bill Cyr, Matt Flood, Cori Kiley, Julia Torpey, Debbie Ventunelli, Dementred Young; and advisors John Roney and Phyllis Machledt.

25. Machledt, personal interview, 30 November 2000. ("Fr. Mike" refers to Fr. Michael McLernon, campus chaplain at the time.)

26. Machledt, personal interview, 4 December 2000.

27. Don Harrison, "Habitat Home Helps to Transform Bridgeport," *Sacred Heart University* (summer 2000): 7.

28. Eilene Bertsch, class talk, 9 November 1999.

29. Harrison, "Habitat Home," 7.

30. Eilene Bertsch, personal interview, 2 January 2001.

31. Harrison, "Habitat Home," 7. More recently, at the 16th Annual Meeting of Habitat for Humanity of Greater Bridgeport held on January 21, 2001, Otterspoor was further honored for his volunteer efforts with Habitat's Second Mile award. Then, at the Inn at Longshore on February 10, 2001, Otterspoor and fellow-student Patricia Kurowski, along with members from the Community Builders group and seven other coalitions, were honored with Hearts and Hammers awards for their "commitment to help Habitat meet its aggressive goals to build at least 25 houses this year" (*Habitat for Humanity of Greater Bridgeport*, issue 1, 2001, 6).

32. The group was composed of students Angela Bowden, Brian Bunnell, Sean Otterspoor, and Anne Marie D'Amore; alumna Patricia Kurowski; and Otterspoor's mother Suzanne, and sister Jacqueline.

33. "Habitat Group Builds Hope in Philippines," *Fairfield County Catholic*, September 2000, 22.

34. "Habitat Group Builds Hope in Philippines," 22.

35. Angel Bowden, personal interview, 10 January 2001.

36. Shannon Stone, "Habitat for Humanity Works Toward Another Busy Year," *Spectrum*, 15 September 2000, 8.

37. Phyllis Machledt, campus e-mail, 5 December 2000.

38. Brooks Parmelee and Lauren Kempton, "The Work/Learning Project in El Salvador, 1998," 3.

39. "Visitor Embodies University Mission," *Spectrum*, 28 September 1995, 6.

40. The group of faculty and administrators consisted of Ricardo Cordova, Charlotte Gradie, Katherine Kidd, and Robin McAllister. The report, reflecting the thinking of the group at that time, was entitled "Proposal for Work in El Salvador," and was submitted January 4, 1996.

It stated: "While our involvement in El Salvador to the present time has been very fruitful, it is still peripheral to the primary mission of the University—teaching, writing and research, and service. We believe the three pragmatic components of this proposal would clearly link our involvement in El Salvador to the University's mission and would institutionalize that involvement making it a regular, on-going part of the program of the University." The three components were: "1. Sacred Heart University Internally Funded Program for El Salvador"; "2. Biennial Interdisciplinary Conference on Central America"; and "3. Academic Year Study Abroad Program in El Salvador." The authors of the proposal, which was forwarded to "El Salvador Related Faculty and Administrators," asked for "substantive suggestions and critiques." Charlotte Gradie, referring to the fate of the proposal, said recently, "We felt that SHU could play a role in providing a place for scholars to continue to discuss Central American issues, since to our knowledge no such forum exists in the U.S. My recollection is that our administration was not interested in supporting this, preferring instead to approach the problem of promoting peace and democracy in Central America through student service-learning efforts and faculty tours of El Salvador" (campus e-mail, 12 September 2000). As it turned out, the University decided to continue to fund faculty trips and support the student work delegations that started during the 1996 Spring Break.

41. Shelley Lyford, "Letter from El Salvador," *Spectrum*, 9 November 1995, 1.

42. Lyford, "Letter from El Salvador," 3.

43. Erin Harrison, "Students to Serve and Learn in El Salvador," *Spectrum*, 1 February 1996, 1. The students selected for the first trip included Greg Botello, Matthew Browning, Edith Castro, Eddie Cisneros, Shelley Lyford, Brooks Parmelee, Dementred Young, and Heather Young.

44. Erin Harrison, "Spring Break in El Salvador," *Spectrum*, 18 April 1996, 1.

45. Quoted in Harrison, "Spring Break in El Salvador," 1.

46. Richard Weizel, "Spring Break with a Purpose," *Sacred Heart University* (spring 1996): 6.

47. Quoted in Harrison, "Spring Break in El Salvador," 1.

48. Elene Bertsch and Donna Dodge, personal interview, 13 March 2001.

49. Don Harrison, "Spring Break in El Salvador," *Sacred Heart University* (summer 1997): 12.

50. Parmelee and Kempton, "The Work/Learning Project in El Salvador, 1998," 2.

51. Parmelee and Kempton, 5.
52. "El Salvador Delegation Visits New Town," *Spectrum*, 4 May 2000, 1-2.
53. "El Salvador Delegation Visits New Town," 2.
54. Terry Neu, campus e-mail, 10 January 2001.

Chapter 7

1. Phyllis Machledt, personal interview, 30 November 2000.
2. Eilene Bertsch, class talk, 9 November 1999.
3. "Community Connections '98," Sacred Heart University, 1998.
4. Quoted in Erin E. Harrison, "Students Connect with Local Inner-City Community," *Spectrum*, 12 September 1996, 3.
5. Don Harrison, "A Tree Grows in Bridgeport," *Sacred Heart University* (fall 1996): 14.
6. Harrison, "A Tree Grows in Bridgeport," 14-15.
7. "Community Connections '99," Sacred Heart University, 1999.
8. Harrison, "A Tree Grows in Bridgeport," 14.
9. Phyllis Machledt, "ISTUDENTS," campus e-mail, 1 December 1999.
10. "CURTIS Week Information."
11. Phyllis Machledt, personal interview, 28 December 2000.
12. "CURTIS Week Scheduled to Honor Late Bridgeport Bishop," *Bridgeport News*, 23 December 1999, 15.
13. "CURTIS Week Information."
14. Phyllis Machledt, personal interview, 28 December 2000. The student participants for the first CURTIS Week included Anne Marie D'Amore, Angela Bowden, Jesse White, Dan Gorton, Lucie Davis, Isabel Shadell, Chris D'Amico, Althea Green, Emmey Chay, Michael DiPetro, Scott Urbinati, Rodrigo Mendes, Joe Borgia, Sang-hee Lee, Ben Aguirre, and Nasima Islam.
15. Machledt, personal interview.
16. "CURTIS Week Information."
17. Brenda Mendez, "Service program targets students new to volunteering," *Spectrum*, 9 December 1999, 2.
18. Don Harrison, "Honoring the University's Founder," *Sacred Heart University* (summer 2000): 7.
19. Angela Bowden, personal interview, 10 January 2001.
20. Machledt, personal interview.
21. Machledt, personal interview.
22. Phyllis Machledt, personal interview, 1 February 2001.
23. Fr. Joseph John Saba, Jr., letter to Michelle D. Gilliard, Executive

Director of the Consortium for the Advancement of Private Higher Education, 3 October 2000.

24. Michael Emery, personal interview, 2 January 2001.

25. Donna Dodge, personal interview, 2 January 2001.

26. "St. Charles/SHU Health and Wellness Center Project Proposal Summary," 27 June 2000.

27. Linda Strong, campus e-mail, 11 January 2001.

28. Emery, personal interview.

29. Emery, personal interview.

30. Patricia Walker, campus e-mail, 19 January 2001.

31. Dori Taylor Sullivan, personal interview, 29 January 2001.

32. "Community/University Advisory Committee" for SHU/St. Charles East Side Health and Wellness Center, 14 August 2000 (revised). The committee held its initial meeting November 9, 2000.

33. Emery, personal interview.

34. Emery, personal interview. An initial ribbon cutting ceremony for the new center was held at St. Charles on March 24, 2001; a more formal opening ceremony and blessing, that included parish, city, and University officials, was held April 27, 2001.

35. "Proposal for SHU Health and Wellness Center at St. Charles" for the Consortium for the Advancement of Private Higher Education [CIC], October 2000, 11.

36. CIC Proposal, 1

37. Emery, personal interview.

38. Dodge, personal interview.

39. Eilene Bertsh, personal interview, 2 January 2001.

40. Emery, personal interview.

41. Jim Minor, personal interview, 2. January 2001.

42. Minor, personal interview.

43. Minor, personal interview.

44. Jim Minor, personal interview, 1 February 2001.

45. Minor, personal interview, 2 January 2001.

Chapter 8

1. "Catholic Social Thought Scholars Proposal," 2.

2. Gerald Reid, personal interview, 9 February 2001.

3. Margaret Palliser, personal interview, 9 February 2001.

4. Reid, personal interview.

5. Reid, personal interview.

6. "Catholic Social Thought Scholars Proposal," 2.

7. "Catholic Social Thought Scholars Proposal," 2.
8. Reid, personal interview. The first group of students accepted as potential candidates for the program included the following freshmen and sophomores: Dorian Aguilar, Jamie Bell, William Borrelli, Jr., Kathleen Crounse, Christine DePierro, Katherine Dervan, Kimberly Farinelli, Christopher Ginty, Michelle Hubbard, Craig Joly, Peter Kuczynski, Taryn Mahoney, Keri Nastri, Susan Pawlishen, Kelly Thurber, Danielle Tumbarello, and Jennifer Underhill.
9. Noelle D'Agostino, personal interview, 1 February 2001.
10. Phyllis Machledt, personal interview, 1 February 2001.
11. "Catholic Social Thought Scholars Proposal," 3.
12. Machledt, personal interview.
13. "Catholic Social Thought Scholars Proposal," 4-5.
14. "Catholic Social Thought Scholars Proposal," 5.
15. Reid, personal interview.
16. "Catholic Social Thought Scholars Proposal," 5.
17. Palliser, personal interview.
18. Eilene Bertsch, personal interview, 21 February 2001.
19. "The night of the first earthquake in El Salvador—January 13, 2001—and for days afterwards," wrote Lauren Kempton, "our phone did not stop ringing. Hank Parkinson, Melissa Hensley, Heather Heath, Kelly Libby . . . many, many former participants in the student delegations who had traveled to El Salvador in previous years called. 'Have you heard about the earthquake?' . . . 'Have you spoken with Elena?' . . . 'How is she?' . . . 'How are the villagers?' . . . 'How's the church?' . . . 'How can we get more information?' Everyone needed to know, and they knew that if anyone would have the answers to their questions, it would be Brooks and Lauren. It felt so right to be information central for these bright and concerned young SHU graduates, who still clearly feel themselves linked in important ways to the people of the villages we have visited in Usulután" (campus e-mail, 17 March 2001).
20. Kathy A. Ogle, co-coordinator of EPICA, writes: "The crisis is of much greater proportion than was first thought, and the response has been far from sufficient. Once again the poor have been the hardest hit by the disaster because of the precarious conditions in which they are forced to live" (letter to "Dear Friends," EPICA: Washington, D.C., 20 February 2001).
21. Robin McAllister, personal interview, 21 February 2001.
22. César Muñoz, "Fighting the Enduring Earthquake," 1.
23. Robin McAllister, "El Salvador Journal," 28 February 2001.

24. Muñoz, "Fighting the Enduring Earthquake," 2.
25. Terry Neu, personal interview, 28 February 2001.
26. Muñoz, "Fighting the Enduring Earthquake," 2
27. Neu, personal interview.
28. McAllister, "El Salvador Journal."
29. Neu, personal interview.
30. McAllister, "El Salvador Journal."
31. Neu, personal interview.
32. McAllister, "El Salvador Journal."
33. Sr. Elena Jaramillo. Unedited video by César Muñoz, Tierra Blanca, El Salvador, 11 February 2001.
34. McAllister, personal interview.
35. McAllister, "El Salvador Journal."
36. Lauren Kempton, campus e-mail.
37. Donna Dodge and Eilene Bertsch, personal interview, 18 January 2001.
38. Dodge and Bertsch, personal interview.
39. Bertsch, personal interview.
40. Bertsch, personal interview, 23 January 2001.
41. Dori Taylor Sullivan, personal interview, 29 January 2001.
42. Noelle D'Agostino, personal interview, 1 February 2001.
43. Fr. Bob Malone, personal interview, 21 February 2001.
44. Machledt, personal interview.
45. Machledt, personal interview.
46. Donna Dodge and Eilene Bertsch, personal interview, 13 March 2001.
47. Machledt, personal interview.
48. Anthony J. Cernera, "Welcome from the President," *Sacred Heart University Undergraduate Catalog* (2000-01), 2.
49. Anthony J. Cernera, class talk, 23 March 1999.

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