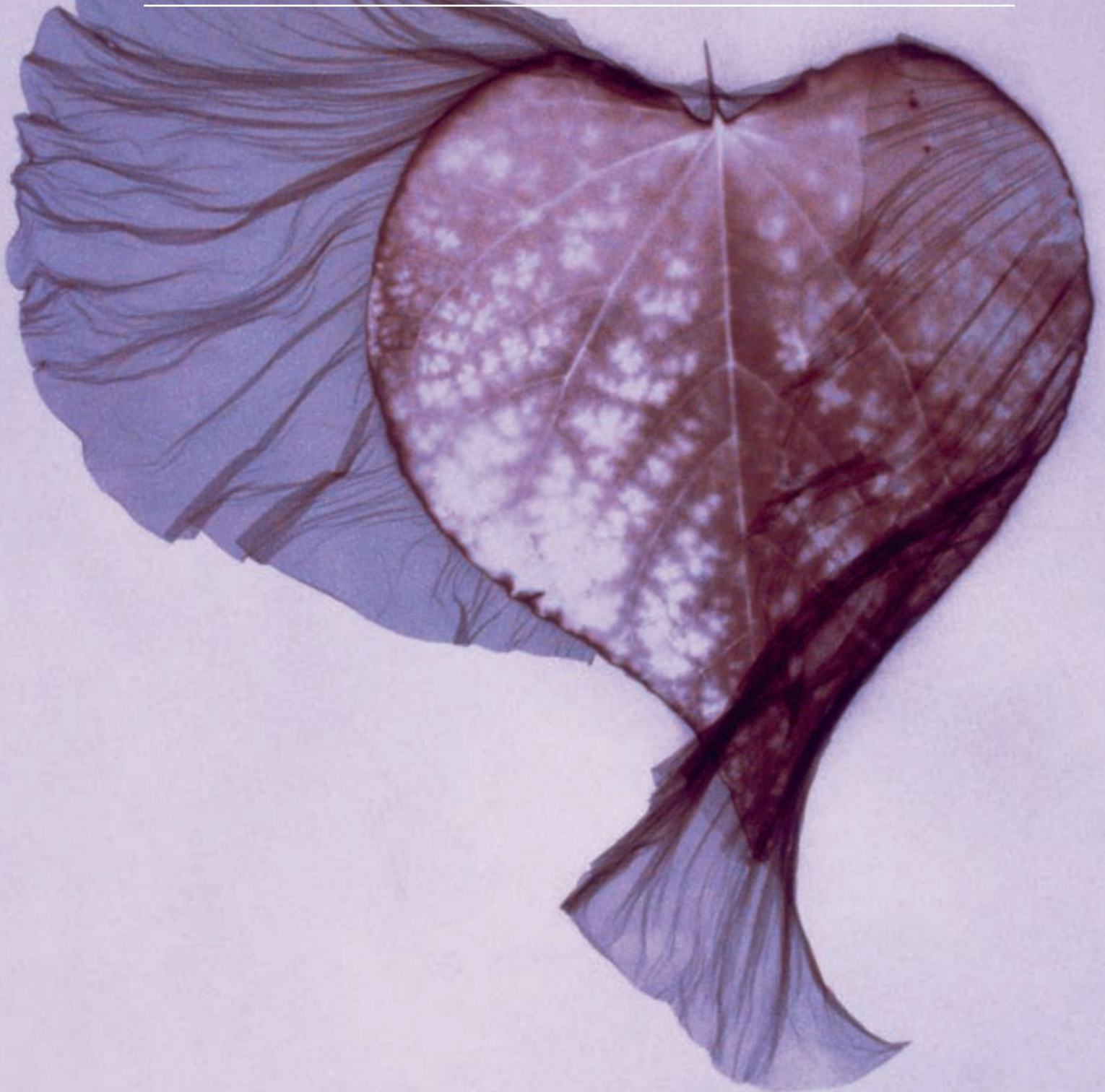




# Heart

Winter 2005

A Journal of the Society of the Sacred Heart, U.S. Province



# ...to Heart

Since the last days of August, our minds and hearts have been filled with images of New Orleans – a city ravaged by wind and water, a people devastated by the loss of family and friends, of homes and jobs, of their very way of life.

We have seen so many photos of people wading through water, seeking refuge on overpasses or in the Superdome. We have seen aerial views of flooded streets as far as the eye could see. And we have seen people on rooftops desperately searching the skies for a helicopter to rescue them. What has touched us, what haunts us, in these photos?

The *Constitutions* of the Society of the Sacred Heart call us to “contemplate reality and to experience it with the Heart of Jesus” (§21). All over the world people in our Sacred Heart family, and many others, have contemplated these images in light of the “attitudes” of Jesus – and have responded with tears, with compassion and with enormous generosity, sending funds for the people of the wealthiest nation in the world. We are awed and humbled.

In October, I had the opportunity to talk with people from New Orleans who had evacuated to Houston and Grand Coteau, Louisiana. When I would ask how they were feeling, their first response so often was, “I’m so grateful,” or, “We are very blessed!” People who were still in shock, filled with uncertainty, some having lost almost everything, kept talking about their gratitude for what they *did* have, and for the extraordinary welcome they had received in their temporary settings. I was indeed awed and humbled by their capacity to contemplate their own reality and respond with a sense of gratitude.

This issue of *Heart* brings to you the experience of some of these people. As you read, some wait in hope of return; others are back in New Orleans, trying to reconstruct their lives and rebuild their city.

The photos, however, continue to haunt me. Beyond the faces of individuals, they exposed a social reality that we had hoped was no longer true. But we have learned, sadly, that the difference in access to resources and opportunity in our country continues to fall along lines of race and socio-economic status. As we contemplate this disparity through the eyes of Jesus, what do we see? What do we feel? How are we called to respond?

As you read these articles, it is Advent, a season brimming over with a sense of promise becoming reality: that those in exile will return, the city (Jerusalem) will be rebuilt, the new society within that Holy City will ensure an abundance of food for everyone. It will be a city in which those who had previously threatened one another now dwell together, a city whose rebuilding brings “good news” for the poor.

Advent calls us to contemplate these images: to let them fill our hearts with the quality of relationships they portray; shape our thoughts that we might envision structures that will make these relationships possible in Uptown and in the Ninth Ward; embolden our resolve to do something to help the dream become reality – in New Orleans and in each of our cities. ✚



*Kathleen Conan RSCJ*

Kathleen Conan, RSCJ  
Provincial



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*Feature articles beginning on pages 9 and 12 in this issue are by Pamela Schaeffer, editor of Heart. Photos for those articles and for the article beginning on page 17 are also by Schaeffer, except where otherwise noted.*

# Heart

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### *Eight-member group to assist provincial team*

An eight-member consulting group has been appointed to assist provincial Kathleen Conan, RSCJ, and the U.S. provincial team. The group will serve as a sounding board for leadership, bringing perspectives of RSCJ living and ministering around the country, thereby expanding involvement in leadership and governance of the U.S. province.

As shown in the photo below, the consultants are, from left to right, Barbara Bowe of Chicago; Imma De Stefanis of Purchase, New York; Nancy Kehoe of Boston; Bridget Bears of Detroit (front row); Diana Wall of Albany, New York (standing behind Sister Bears); Mary Kay Hunyady of San Francisco; and Judith Garson of New York City. Sister Marilyn McMorrow of Washington D.C. was not present for the photo.



Sister Conan looks forward to the expanded conversations the consulting group will make possible. "We anticipate that these talented women will be of great service to us as we consider present and future issues in the life of the province," she said. The consultants were nominated by RSCJ and selected by the provincial team. They are expected to meet with the team four times a year. ❖

### *New criteria for schools reflect mission, realities*

The Society of the Sacred Heart, U.S. Province, recently published revised *Goals and Criteria for Sacred Heart Schools in the United States*. The revised document better reflects the Society's mission in the context of a post-9/11 world, according to Sister Paula Toner, the U.S. provincial team's representative to the Sacred Heart Commission on Goals, which spearheaded the revision process.

Implications of the new document have been "revitalizing" for administrators, trustees and faculty, Sister Toner said.

"They realize that the new criteria have the power to transform our educational work by making it more deeply challenging on the level of living out our values."

A nationwide video conference marked the document's release. Text of a related homily by Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ, former U.S. provincial, is available at [www.rscj.org](http://www.rscj.org). ❖

### *In Memoriam*

*Please see [www.rscj.org](http://www.rscj.org)  
for biographical information  
on RSCJ who have died.*

**May they live in the fullness  
of God's love.**

*Nancy Boak  
September 4, 2005*

*Melita Attard  
September 17, 2005*

*Mary Byles  
November 9, 2005*

*Geraldine Murphy  
November 15, 2005*

*Julia Hurley  
November 21, 2005*

*Catherine Hoza  
November 29, 2005*

### *AMASC congress canceled for 2006*

Olga Rome, world president of AMASC, the international organization of Sacred Heart alumnae/i, announced in November that the 2006 AMASC Congress, scheduled for April in New Orleans, is canceled because of damage to the city in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

AMASC's General Assembly will meet in April, as required by the organization's constitution.

"As children of the Sacred Heart, let us pray to Philippine for the strength and courage to stand together at this trying time," said Rome, who lives in New Orleans. "Together, we continue on our journey of the heart!" ❖

## New group sets stage for strong future

By Shirley Miller, RSCJ

In mid-November in St. Charles, Missouri, on the feast of Saint Philippine Duchesne, the newly established National Leadership Development Committee met for the first time to reflect on the mission of the Society of the Sacred Heart in light of the needs of the world today.

The meeting marked a watershed moment for the U.S. Province. It charted a new course for mission advancement efforts and set a new stage of collaboration in fund raising to ensure a strong future for the mission and ministries of the province and the

care of elderly Religious of the Sacred Heart. Throughout, committee members remained conscious of the harvest the U.S. Province has reaped from the seeds sown by Philippine and her early companions and deeply aware of the Society's mission: to discover and make known God's love through the service of education.

The committee also reflected on the Society's *Constitutions*, which call for the service of education to be carried out in three areas: teaching and formation; other activities for human development and promotion of justice; pastoral work and spiritual guidance.

The eleven members of the National Leadership Development Committee are charged with providing advocacy and support for a long-range development plan for the province. This includes helping to set strategy for the mission advancement office, identifying prospective donors and making donor requests, as well as monitoring performance and results of

the development work.

One of the most gratifying dimensions of the meeting in St. Charles was members' unanimity in understanding and supporting the province's mission-driven priorities: elder care, justice and peace ministries, Sacred Heart education, and other province projects.

Donors, whether through annual giving, planned giving, major gifts or bequests, will have the opportunity to make unrestricted gifts or to earmark funds for use in the four key areas.

One element of this collaborative effort is an agreement between the U.S. Province and the Network of Sacred Heart Schools to join together their development efforts, sharing a single office and director. The Network provided a \$200,000 gift to the retirement fund for elderly religious and is committed to giving \$100,000 a year for three years to help underwrite the cost of development work. This support acknowledges the Society's financial support for Network programs and its strong commitment to the Network's educational goals.

The Associated Alumnae/i of the Sacred Heart has been assisting in the development effort since the province's mission advancement office opened in January, 2004. The organization will continue to participate actively in the collaborative fund raising effort.

The province is deeply grateful to the Network, the AASH, and to each of the committee members for their dedication and commitment. Our united efforts will be a big step forward in ensuring the future of the Society's educational mission in the United States and the care of our elderly religious. ✦

*Sister Miller is director of mission advancement for the Society of the Sacred Heart, U.S. Province.*



Committee members, from left, are Nancy Morris, RSCJ, development director for Oakwood Convent of the Sacred Heart; Adele Botticelli, AASH president; Patricia Arnold, development director for the Missouri Botanical Garden; Cathy Taft, development director for Kenwood Convent of the Sacred Heart; Sister Miller; Michael Ryan of the Network Board of Directors; Jane O'Connell of the Altman Foundation; Kathleen Conan, RSCJ, Provincial, U.S. Province; and Susan Maxwell, RSCJ, also of the Network board. Not shown are Ellen Shafer, alumna and former Network board member, and Larry Vaclavik, consultant, Dini Partners.





RSCJ who joined together on an international service program last summer are, from left, Imma De Stefanis, Reyna González, Madeline Ortiz and Mary Finlayson.

## Solidarity in Service

By Imma De Stefanis, RSCJ

They arrived in a steady stream in mid-June. They came to “risk something different and discover the loving face of Christ.” They came “with a small vision of the world, yet knowing a bigger world was out there.” They came “tired of the routine of life,” “to help and to serve others,” because they wanted to “change the world.”

They are fifteen young women in their late teens through early thirties who hail from Canada, Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico and the United States. They were drawn to an international summer service project born of many conversations among RSCJ who wanted to come together across provinces and reach out to young adults, while providing them with a concrete experience of who we are and how we live our charism.

The project, held in San Luis Potosi, Mexico, and coordinated by four RSCJ—Mary Finlayson of Canada, Reyna González of Mexico, Madeline Ortiz of Puerto Rico, and myself—centered on service, reflection and input. Most mornings we gathered at the community center to enjoy a breakfast prepared by young people of the neighborhood. Beginning the day with prayer, we reflected on the gifts and struggles of living in a different culture, working within an international group, and sharing tight quarters with families who had opened their homes and hearts with generosity and

care. Morning-long workshops on various topics helped participants better understand the reality in which they were immersed and to lead them to deeper reflection on their own call and their commitment to social change through action.

Topics, presented by lay people, Jesuits and local RSCJ, included methods of “popular education” (education aimed at raising critical awareness of the world one lives in); theological perspectives on reality; migration and immigration; and effects of globalization.

In the afternoons, participants were assigned in pairs to age groups ranging from three to twelve. The children, right down to the three- and four-year-olds, were encouraged through a variety of activities to get to know their neighborhood as a community to which they belong and can contribute.

Capturing the interest of teenagers proved to be a bit of

*“I came because I wanted  
to change the world,  
and the world changed me.”*

— Sarah Massoud of Canada

a challenge. During evenings spent with older youth, we teasingly threw down the gauntlet: “The goal is to increase youth group participation from its current eight to

a hundred.” They managed to attract forty to fifty more.

Friendships that developed with both children and teens came not only from planned activities, but from hours of soccer on a dusty open field, early morning jogs, a field trip to see *Madagascar*—a first-time visit to a movie theater for many of the seventy-five who went—and hanging out during every little bit of free time otherwise provided for resting and taking care of chores.

In a ritual of sending that ended our time together, each woman was given a black wooden ring as a symbol of her solidarity with the poor and her commitment to work for justice. Perhaps more importantly, participants left impressed by the simplicity and generosity of the people and a desire to continue to live and work with the poor. They took with them the knowledge that they are unified across borders in their struggle for justice and a strengthened determination to make a difference in the world, combined with the knowledge and confidence that they can. ❖

*Sister De Stefanis is associate academic dean for grants and program development at Manhattanville College. She holds a Ph.D. in psychology.*

## One world, one heart

By Muriel Cameron, RSCJ

Conceived at an international meeting of Sacred Heart alumnae/i (AMASC) in Sydney, Australia, in 2001, a learning exchange has joined Sacred Heart students from Mexico and the United States for the past three summers. Its title expresses its underlying vision: *Un Corazón Sin Fronteras*, “A Heart Without Borders,” and *Un Solo Mundo*, *Un Solo Corazón*, “One world, One Heart.” The program has been held in Houston, Guadalajara and, last summer, in New Orleans.

Students and families from the Academy of the Sacred Heart (“the Rosary”) reveled in opening their doors for ten days to guests from Mexico, Miami, Houston, Greenwich, Connecticut, and Princeton, New Jersey. We shared picnics on Lake Pontchartrain and family outings at the zoo. We ambled through the French Quarter, listened to jazz, enjoyed streetcar rides and dinner together.

Our sharing of cultures was reciprocal. Guests soaked up the experience of New Orleans and host families treasured their guests. Little did we know in those pre-hurricane days that we were seeing the city as it was for perhaps the last time.

Work sites included the Diocesan Hispanic Ministry, the Jesuit-sponsored Good Shepherd Nativity School, and Learning Partners, an academic enrichment program for African-American students sponsored by the Academy of the Sacred Heart. These settings allowed participants to serve severely marginalized persons, while examining causes of poverty, putting faces to words like “oppression” and “systemic suffering” and fulfilling two of the program’s key goals.

Guest speakers told stories of Third World-like realities all around us: children who would go hungry during summer were it not for lunches provided by the programs and “extras” stuffed into their pockets for another meal, or who would have no safe place to play or learn apart from the educational opportunities provided. In afternoon gatherings for reflection and sharing, the young listeners proved to be informed, questioning and eager to nurture a critical social consciousness, as well as rich in the wisdom of youth.

Through a multimedia presentation by Mexican students, U.S. students learned about dire poverty across the border – families living in dirt huts, lacking running water and short on food. This led to a discussion about differences in poverty in the two countries – a comparison of questionable value,



Sister Cameron, second row, left, is shown with other participants in *Un Corazón Sin Fronteras* last summer. Other RSCJ in the photo are Sisters Claude Demoustier, first row, left, and Adriana Parra, first row, second from right, of Guadalajara, Mexico. Lay faculty are Bea Bustillo of Carrollton, Miami, first row, second from left, and Amelia Stephens, Convent of the Sacred Heart, Greenwich, Connecticut, first row right. Faculty member Marissa Bobadillo of Mexico City is not shown.

noted a participant from Mexico. “It is not important to focus on which poverty is worse, but on the fact that whenever we encounter suffering humanity we are called to respond with care and love,” she said.

Evaluations demonstrated the impact of this cross-cultural exchange. “In the future I want to know more about the poverty of other countries and what we young people can do to help,” one young woman wrote. Another said, “It gives me hope to know that others have the same positive intentions as myself.” A third observed, “[We] come together with other girls who have one purpose, to serve, and one main thing in common, we are children of the Sacred Heart. We build a community that lasts much longer than ten days. We make connections that last a lifetime.”

For these students, though, words were not the end. During celebrations of the Feast of Mater in late October, our Mexican schools planned prayer vigils for victims of Hurricane Katrina and raised funds to be used for those most severely affected: the poor.

This generosity-across-borders was Sacred Heart spirituality enfolded: Christ’s love revealed to the poor. ✦

*Sister Cameron is campus minister at Academy of the Sacred Heart, New Orleans.*

## Binding wounds in Indonesia

By Nancy Murphy, RSCJ

Following the earthquake and tsunami that devastated parts of Southeast Asia last year, Clare Pratt, superior general of the Society of the Sacred Heart, asked each of us in the Society to reflect on what response we might make.

According to one estimate, more than 250,000 men, women and children had died or were missing in Indonesia alone, where the Society has an international foundation. Among the dead were said to be hundreds of health care workers. It occurred to me that I might be able to offer assistance, however briefly, with the ongoing medical needs of the people, as I have worked as a pediatric nurse practitioner for many years.

In July, using donated frequent flier miles, I went to Indonesia to join a medical team working in Banda Aceh, the area hardest hit by the tsunami, and in the surrounding camps, where many people were still living in tents. With the help of RSCJ and friends at home, I was able to take medications and supplies.

In Banda Aceh, the clinic staff included volunteer physicians, two Indonesian nurses and an American priest-physician who had helped to organize this free clinic in a parish school. Initially, because I knew little Indonesian, I could only take blood pressure and help dress wounds. But within a couple of days, I was able to see patients, thanks to a young translator who helped me with their medical histories.

In Aceh I met with amazing courage. One young woman, a member of the parish team, had lost her mother and younger sister and brother in the tsunami. She was going out to pray one day at the place where the remains of her house still stood. She told me of having heard her mother, younger sister and brother each cry out to her to save them and of her inability to do so. When I met her, she had been working tirelessly to find a new site for the clinic, which needed to be dismantled, as school was about to resume.

The camps we visited were located outside of Banda Aceh in a breathtaking countryside. When we arrived, the camp leader would alert villagers, who would bring their children for the free medical care.

One day a little girl asked me, "Are you Muslim," and then, "Do you like Muslims?" She seemed satisfied when I responded, "Yes, I like Muslims very much."



*Sister Murphy checks the medical condition of a young Indonesian during her visit to Banda Aceh as a medical volunteer.*

Another day I heard an exchange between a doctor and a man in the camp. The doctor, hoping to convince the man to quit smoking, mentioned his children. The man shook his head. His wife and children had been taken away by the tsunami. More than once I found myself looking around for the parent of a young child who had come to the clinic, only to learn that the tsunami had claimed the parent.

On the island of Nias, I was able to visit a tiny clinic where ten orphans, ranging from infancy to age nine, were being cared for with great affection but in very poor material circumstances. I was particularly delighted to see one smiling eighteen-month-old girl who had just returned from surgery in Los Angeles. She had been sent there under a special program after being diagnosed with a congenital heart defect.

The six RSCJ who live in Indonesia come from India, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines and the United States. Though their community is far from where the tsunami struck, they are deeply involved in the suffering and hopes of the Indonesian people. Their ministries touch the lives of people across boundaries of religion and culture. They have taught me about oneness of heart and spirit.

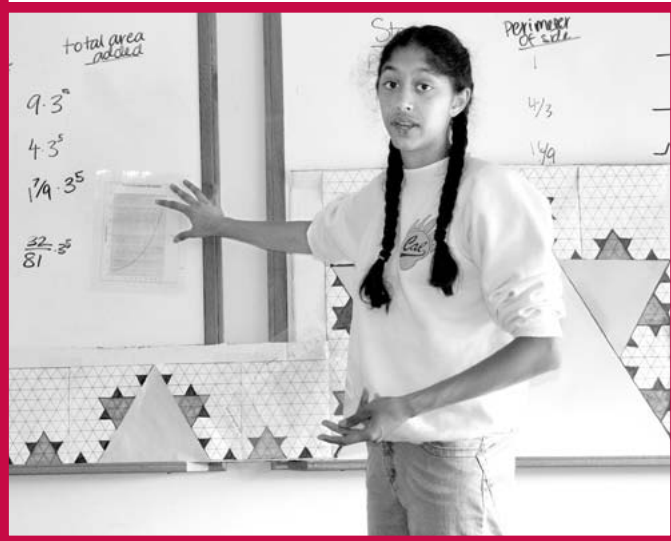
Because I felt the need to listen deeply for what God was teaching me through the gift of this time in Indonesia, I was grateful on my return to the States to go into retreat. I will never forget the people I met or the magnitude of the tragedy that changed their lives forever. And I will never forget their courage, kindness and dignity, which are even greater. ✦

*Sister Murphy works as a pediatric nurse practitioner in a free clinic located in a public school in East Harlem.*



# Splash: Diving into Science in Seattle

A group of middle school girls came upon a passion flower during a nature walk near Seattle last summer and recognized in its geometric forms more than dazzling beauty. “Fractals,” said one, glancing knowingly at her friends. They nodded in agreement and moved closer to study the remarkable symmetry of the giant purple blossom.



*Surabhi Nirkhe, a participant in Splash 2005, gives a presentation on fractals, her area of focus during the program.*

The nature walk in late July, led by naturalist-educator Rex Lybrand, was part of a three-day experience at Islandwood, a 225-acre outdoor learning center on Bainbridge Island in Puget Sound. The live-in days at Islandwood were the culminating event of Splash, a four-week summer math and science enrichment camp for middle school girls that Kathleen Sullivan, RSCJ, has directed for the past thirteen years.

## Peers are key

Fractals? The term is likely to be unfamiliar to people whose math study ended before, say, the 1980s. Simply defined, fractals are geometric patterns that are repeated at various scales. The term was coined in 1975 by Benoit Mandelbrot, who took it from the Latin “fractus,” meaning “broken.” It is an important mathematical concept in computer modeling of irregular structures in nature, for instance, that cannot be represented by classical geometry.

Fractals were among the concepts girls studied at this year’s Splash, and for some it was a favorite. Others chose to deepen their knowledge of such subjects as DNA, hydrostatic pressure, water and sound waves (using the university’s ultrasound equipment), web page development and the mechanics and dynamics of flight.

Sister Sullivan, professor emerita of mathematics at Seattle University, developed Splash as a way to keep middle school girls interested in math and science. When the program was founded, few such enrichment programs existed for middle  
*continued*

*Sister Sullivan, founder of the thirteen-year-old math and science enrichment program, takes a break during a week at Islandwood last summer.*



*Richard Rogers, front left, and Mary Pat Sullivan, rear, Splash mentors since the program's beginning, look on as students take water samples from a lake at Islandwood.*

schoolers, and even today, when programs are more numerous, those that limit enrollment to girls are few.

Splash is not an acronym but a term that suggests “splash around in,” “get involved with,” and, perhaps most important, “interact and learn, while having fun.”

Sister Sullivan considers it crucial to bring such a program to young teens, because girls are at an age when even the talented and curious are at risk of labeling scientific subjects “unfeminine” and turning away. “Research shows girls become uncomfortable with their interest in these subjects in middle school,” she said. “Splash gives them a chance to be with other girls of similar interests and to discover that people interested in math and science aren't necessarily ‘nerdy.’”

Further, she noted, peer support is extremely important for women choosing a career. “Research shows that women who go into non-traditional careers nearly always have a good friend who entered the field. Role models have a certain value, but colleagues and friends of the same age have much bigger influence.”

Splash is an accelerated program, modeled on Sacred Heart education, Sister Sullivan explained, but it is free to all participants, who are selected with special consideration for racial and economic diversity. Letters inviting students to apply are mailed to all Seattle area middle schools. The thirty participants this year – each of them a straight-A student between the seventh and eighth grade – came from seventeen middle schools, including Forest Ridge School of the Sacred Heart in Bellevue, Washington.

“I want the girls to operate in a diverse community, because frequently they don't have that opportunity,” Sister Sullivan said. She considers economic diversity to be critical, because “breaking the cycle of poverty is often a matter of raising expectations.”

This year's sessions were held at Seattle University's College of Science and Engineering. After a week of classes, the students spent two weeks doing what scientists do. Using

the university's state-of-the-art equipment, they conducted experiments, performed research and analyzed results.

For these hands-on segments of the program, students broke into small teams according to their chosen topics. With the help of scientist-mentors from Seattle University and from the Boeing Company, they designed and carried out experiments that included analyzing DNA to track down the perpetrator of a fictional crime, doing mathematical modeling with fractals, using plants to remove contaminants from soil, learning how equipment works in order to make repairs, and investigating the cause of a mock plane crash using newly acquired knowledge of aerodynamics and fictitious maintenance records. The maintenance records were compiled by an employee of Boeing, Simon Lee, whose work involves investigating plane crashes for the company. Lee was among five volunteers from Boeing who worked with Splash students this year.

In the third week, devoted to the environmental sciences, students learned from professionals to assess water quality by collecting samples from area streams. At first the girls were put off by bugs in the water. “Most of them are city kids,” Sister Sullivan said. “They go, ‘Bugs. Gross! Bad water.’” But they quickly learned that absence of bugs can actually be a sign of poor water quality.

At Islandwood, students learned about organic gardening and ate organic produce for meals, analyzed pond water from the center's “floating classroom,” practiced team-building on a challenge course, gathered around a campfire for skits and songs, constructed and painted papier-mache masks modeled on ceremonial masks of the region's indigenous people, and reflected on what the Splash experience had meant to them.

“We are learning so many things you really need to learn but didn't know before, and we are doing it in a fun way, so



*Auri Mathisen, standing, places strands of paste-coated paper across the face of Chelsea Gonzales. They are participating in a mask-making project related to the native culture of Puget Sound.*





*Rex Lybrand, naturalist at Islandwood, talks to a group of students about plants. From left, the girls are Amada Szkutak, Claire Pfeifer and Megan Besch.*

we can understand it,” noted Mahalet Assefa, a native of Ethiopia. She opted to investigate a crime scene in the second week, taking DNA from a piece of chewed gum that a fictitious criminal had left behind. “We went through the process of multiplying the DNA, looking at it under ultraviolet lights, and comparing it with our own DNA,” she said. She found that the project had raised her sights for the future. “I never thought about becoming a biochemist, but now...”

An Nguyen, a participant of Vietnamese descent, had been among girls who chose to work with fractals, a concept she’d only brushed over previously. “I have learned a lot of valuable skills, research skills, how to evaluate data, time management skills – things we can definitely use,” she said. “The way they teach you here, you get to interact with people who have a positive attitude and also want to learn. At school, some people don’t have our outlook.”

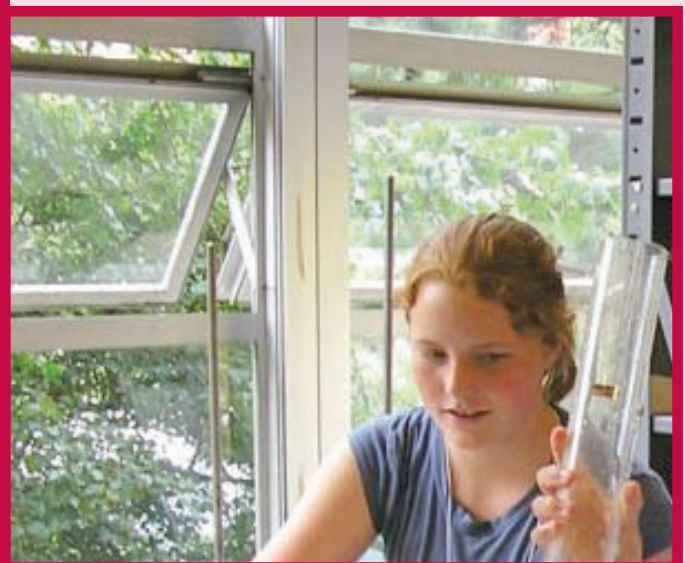
One of Sister Sullivan’s all-time favorite comments came from a girl who said she had really enjoyed Splash “because everyone here is funny, smart and nice.” Sister Sullivan loves the confidence expressed in that quote. “You can easily get middle school girls to describe themselves or their peers as ‘funny’ or ‘nice,’ ” she said, “but they are much less likely to be comfortable describing themselves as smart.”

For Sister Sullivan, a graduate of Duchesne College in Omaha, educating girls has been a lifelong passion. She earned a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin in 1974 and a master’s degree in computer science from the University of Iowa in 1987. She has taught at Barat College, the University of San Diego, Manhattanville College, Loras College, and, since 1987, at Seattle University. She has given presentations on Splash at national meetings of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and at joint meetings of the American Mathematical Society and the Mathematical Association of America.

She estimates that she has raised nearly \$1 million over the years to fund the tuition-free Splash programs, which operate with a core paid staff of scientists and educators. Donors have included national and regional governmental agencies, numerous major corporations and foundations, and the Religious of the Sacred Heart through the U.S. Province’s Fund for Ministry. Splash has also benefited from donations of personnel from Boeing and Snohomish County Surface Water Management – a huge boon, Sister Sullivan said, because they, along with professors and graduate students at Seattle University, play a big role in dreaming up the projects for the kids. Although Boeing decided this year to discontinue its policy of employee release time for community service, five of the company’s employees who had previously been involved signed on as volunteers, taking vacation days or working the night shift at Boeing to make their participation possible.

Over the years, too, Sister Sullivan has collected many success stories involving former Splash participants. Some have won prizes at national science fairs. Some have gone on to earn doctoral degrees in scientific fields or master’s degrees in nursing, or to become physicians. “On an Internet survey, marking the tenth anniversary of Splash, eighty percent of those responding listed among their career goals fields in which women are underrepresented,” she said.

But Sister Sullivan sees a benefit to Splash even for those young women who eventually veer away from scientific careers. As a result of their participation, she hopes that “they will be more informed and effective citizens of our technological world, confident of their gifts and conscious of their responsibility to use them in the service of others.” ✦



*Photo by Carl Swenson*

*Anne Schreck, An Nguyen and Natalie Huyen (from left) team up on an experiment in a University of Seattle lab.*



# *A rainbow is a promise*

## The Sacred Heart family rallies to help hurricane victims

*“We have a new baby!”* Speaking nearly in unison in late October, Elizabeth Renard, RSCJ, and her co-worker Julia Richard heralded this news of new life at the Thensted Center in Grand Coteau, Louisiana. They went to fetch the evidence: Anjae, a baby girl born October 14, at 10:45 a.m., to one of thirty-five Hurricane Katrina evacuees, members of an extended family temporarily resettled at the center after leaving New Orleans by car, helicopter or boat.

The baby was one of many signs of hope arising at sites along the Gulf Coast where the family of the Sacred Heart had given hospitality to people displaced by an event that was, by many measures, the nation’s worst natural disaster. In addition to the center, four Network of Sacred Heart schools situated near New Orleans – Academy of the Sacred Heart in Grand Coteau, and Duchesne Academy of the Sacred Heart, Regis School of the Sacred Heart and Our Lady of Guadalupe

in Houston – responded with wide open doors, taking in a combined 500 extra students, most from the Academy of the Sacred Heart (“the Rosary”) in New Orleans.

Mary Burns, headmistress at Grand Coteau, said the challenge of incoming students threatened to overwhelm the school after flooding in New Orleans made it impossible for the evacuees to return. Creation of satellite campuses for Rosary students in three separate buildings around town brought relief.

“It was absolute chaos here,” Sheila Kurtz, head of Grand Coteau’s upper school, told a visitor. “We had hundreds in our front hall. Every story broke your heart. Right away, Mary Burns said we would take all girls from the Rosary, but she had no idea how many that would be.” Later, following the decision to move the Rosary’s upper and middle school students to the satellite buildings, students from other New Orleans schools were integrated into regular classes at Grand Coteau. In all, more than 350 students were given refuge.

In Houston, at Duchesne Academy of the Sacred Heart, a similar story unfolded. The school took in nearly 150 extra students, along with some administrators, faculty and staff, working them into existing space. “This certainly has been an experience of the Network,” said headmistress Jan Dunn, RSCJ. She referred not only to the hospitality that had been extended, but also to what had been received: donations of uniforms, books and money, given to host schools, to the Rosary, and to a relief fund established by the Society of the Sacred Heart. (The four schools in Grand Coteau and Houston were among seventeen Sacred Heart schools around the country that accepted students from New Orleans without



*Above, from left, Sister Alice Mills, Julia Richard and Sister Elizabeth Renard enjoy a moment with two-week-old Anjae, born in October at Thensted Center. The map at right shows the region of Louisiana discussed in the article. Grand Coteau is situated about fourteen miles north of Lafayette. Baton Rouge, the state capital, is northeast of Lafayette. New Orleans sits below Lake Pontchartrain, the large body of inland water at far right.*



Map illustration by NewsCom

At right, permanent and temporary students at Duchesne Academy of the Sacred heart in Houston gather around Sister Jan Dunn, headmistress. Students, back row, from left, are Annarose Swersey, Duchesne; Adair Vulevich, the Rosary; Elizabeth Ruddy, Duchesne, and Sibyl Stumm, the Rosary. Front row, from left: Maria Merrill and Rachel Hughes of Duchesne.



Below right, girls from Academy of the Sacred Heart, New Orleans, meet around portable tables for a class and find spaces on the floor for group or independent work at one of three satellite campuses in Grand Coteau.

charging tuition, though at schools farther away, the numbers of evacuees were much smaller.)

Meanwhile, Tim Burns, head of school at the Rosary (no relation to Mary Burns), kept tabs on the situation from a temporary office in the kitchen at the Network of Sacred Heart Schools in St. Charles, Missouri, tracking student whereabouts, the situation in New Orleans, and a host of issues related to the unprecedented disruption. Sister Cynthia Vives, SHCJ, head of the Rosary's middle school, created an electronic buzz book from St. Louis as e-mails whizzed back and forth.

### Helping hands

Sheila Kurtz noted that before the hurricane hit, the student council at Grand Coteau had, in prophetic irony, chosen "Extreme Makeover" as the school year's theme, basing it on a quotation of Mahatma Gandhi, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." Yet, for both hosts and their unexpected guests, subtle signs of a deep fatigue betrayed courageous veneers as the adrenaline that had propelled people through weeks of upheaval began to subside.

"It's hard to find a family in southern Louisiana that doesn't have between two and fifteen people in their homes," Kurtz said.

Patti Brechtel, the Rosary's dean of students, interviewed in her temporary office in Grand Coteau, was keenly aware of the effects of loss, upheaval and uncertainty on students, faculty and staff. Sleepless nights, sudden meltdowns, panic attacks, memory lapses and trouble concentrating were symptomatic of the dark undercurrent of school settings in which everything "often appears nearly normal" on the surface. "We have to look out for each other, and be aware of how people are coping so that when one of us is having a bad day others can help out," she said.

Many noted that some in Houston and Grand Coteau had been forced to evacuate a second time by the advance of Hurricane Rita, which wreaked devastation on the Texas-Louisiana coast in mid-September. Anne Storey Carty, headmistress at Regis in Houston, where up to forty boys from New Orleans had been enrolled, many with family members connected to Sacred Heart, lamented that a session with a counselor, engaged to speak to the school community post-Katrina, had to be canceled when the threat of Rita

forced the school to close. In Grand Coteau, the academy and satellite campuses were closed for four days.

Meanwhile, gifts poured in from thousands, from all over the world. They ranged from large donations of money to creative personal touches. Some families in Grand Coteau bought Wal-Mart gift cards for evacuees. Convent of the Sacred Heart in Greenwich, Connecticut, sent its staff psychologist, Dr. Jerome Brodlie, to work with students and families in Grand Coteau. A relative of Georgeann Parizek, RSCJ, drove a large truck from Omaha filled with goods for victims resettled in Baton Rouge. At Our Lady of Guadalupe, an inner-city elementary school, Christina Skowronek, principal, was charmed by a gift of stuffed animals sent with notes attached for hurricane victims: "These have helped me through some tough times. I hope they help you." Twelve Katrina evacuees were attending the K-8 school.

At each of the host sites, people were eager to talk about what others had done, setting aside personal traumas and contributions to relate stories of generosity and quiet heroism by co-workers, evacuees or friends.

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*At right, girls from three different schools sit on steps at Academy of the Sacred Heart in Grand Coteau labeled with values of Sacred Heart education. The girls, all seniors, are, from bottom, Melody Austin of Cabrini High in New Orleans, Carrie Chicola of Grand Coteau, and Katie Blum of Mount Carmel Academy in New Orleans. Austin and Blum were among evacuees integrated into regular classes at the school.*



*Below left, Sister Lynne Lieux, head of the Rosary's upper school, keeps an upbeat attitude in her temporary school office. Below right, Rosary juniors Sara Fogleman, left, and Margot Bienvenu work on their laptop computers at a satellite campus in Grand Coteau.*

Sister Renard gave a tour of the reconfigured center, pointing out repairs an evacuee had made. The center's temporary residents had been eager to pitch in, according to Alice Mills, RSCJ, helping to adapt spaces formerly used for tutoring and arts and crafts to accommodate so many guests. "These were people who wanted to be part of our lives here. They didn't want to only receive."

Jackie Montgomery, mother, grandmother, aunt and great-aunt in her family of evacuees at Thensted Center, said the staff there had made them feel welcome and at home. "We were truly blessed to come here," she said.

Meanwhile, a large activity room at Thensted had become a regional distribution center for supplies victims might need. Julia Richard, director, newly schooled in regulations of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, filled loose leaf notebooks, documenting the center's role.

Maureen Little, RSCJ, head of the elementary school at Grand Coteau, pointed to Barbara Moreau, RSCJ, as one of the stalwarts, noting the countless

sandwiches she had made to feed evacuees as they arrived. Sister Moreau had her own targets for special thanks: the people who had stuffed bills in her pockets to help offset the cost of extra food.

Katy Svendson, whose family of five had grown to eight with the addition of three Rosary girls, discounted her own role to praise a friend, Liz Zaunbrecher. Zaunbrecher, in addition to taking in a Rosary student, had found homes for more than forty girls whose parents had temporarily resettled in other cities.

Rosary teacher Kitty Mattesky, who, with help from other faculty members and students themselves, had set up a middle-school-in-diaspora in a parish education center used only on weekends, praised Lorraine Landry, RSCJ, a Rosary art teacher seldom seen without a piece of mending in her lap. Sister Landry, one of six RSCJ from New Orleans being housed by two RSCJ communities in Grand Coteau, had filled her car trunk with evacuees' clothing in need of repair.

School counselors keeping college applications on track for high school seniors, alleviating a major source of anxiety for displaced students, were cited among unsung heroines, as were teachers and administrators who managed to adjust not only to the irregular surroundings, but also to daily shifts in class size as families' circumstances changed.

### Extraordinary women

Many at Grand Coteau praised an alumna, Lynne Lieux, RSCJ, for the unflinching confidence with which she had gone about setting up the satellite campuses. As the Rosary's upper school head, she had led the way in outfitting twelve "learning spaces" in a former physical therapy center and a now-vacant pizza parlor, recruiting other displaced Rosary faculty and staff, even before they could be assured of pay. Classes began with a skeleton schedule, which expanded as new teachers arrived. Further, Sister Lieux and a small band of helpers had ventured back into a flooded New Orleans to transport school buses, computers and a statue of Philippine Duchesne to Grand Coteau.

For her own models of courage, Sister Lieux pointed to her forebears in the Society of the Sacred Heart. "I am only doing what every RSCJ before me would have done," she said. "If you read the history, there are extraordinary stories of women who just walked by faith."

Much of the "new life" at Sacred Heart locations in the South was metaphorical, born of gratitude and coming in the form of new insights and strengthened bonds. "I have never understood the Network until this," said Jennifer Tompkins, an elementary school teacher from the Rosary. Tears welling





At right, Tim Burns, head of school at the Academy of the Sacred Heart in New Orleans, conducts school business from a temporary office in the kitchen at the headquarters of the Network of Sacred Heart Schools in St. Charles, Missouri.



Below, Kitty Mattesky, far right, jokes around with a group of middle school students working on a song about New Orleans for an assembly. Sister Lorraine Landry threads her needle before resuming her voluntary mending chores.

up, she added, “Now I know people mean it when they say we are part of a family.”

Tompkins, one of several displaced teachers making a daily three-hour round-trip commute from Grand Coteau to Baton Rouge, where, in some cases, spouses’ jobs had been relocated, said she had been filling a notebook “with all the things I don’t want to forget about being at Grand Coteau.” Those included traditions that Tompkins planned to adopt at the Rosary after returning home.

“We are all going to be better because of this exchange,” said Mary Fitzmorris, another Rosary teacher. She had gathered her young students for a reading lesson under a large hand-lettered and decorated banner that proclaimed, “We’re blooming where we were planted.”

Mattesky noted that many previously unknown or unnoticed skills and qualities had surfaced in students and faculty alike as they had worked together to make their new surroundings work. “There was very little top-down here,” she said. “We put all the problems on the table and invited people to choose those they wanted to address.” She recalled telling students, after visiting an office supply store and filling up her car, “‘Okay, unload these school supplies, go into that building and figure out how to start a school.’ And they did just that,” she said. “The students were fully part of the team.”

Melody Austin, a senior from Cabrini High School in New Orleans, now a boarding student at Grand Coteau, said she had learned it is possible to “just jump right in and get involved.” Carrie Chicola, a Grand Coteau senior, found it hard to imagine the school year without the student guests. “So much has happened here because of the hurricane,” she said. “I got to know some really awesome girls and to bond with our sister school in New Orleans.”

Mattesky was among numerous members of the Rosary faculty and staff who cited the rural setting of Grand Coteau as a place of healing, as an “oasis of peace” away from the environmental and political fallout of the urban disaster downstate.

“We have grown up here in the country,” she said. “We have found a way, though our



lives are so complex, to bring peace to one another in a simpler environment through the creative process. We have learned to never operate from the negative. And, while we’ve focused on making this place as warm and comfortable as we possibly can for our students, we’ve also done some serious teaching, which is an amazing thing.”



### Blending traditions

By late October though, the diaspora was, for many, about to end. Tim Burns had announced the Rosary would resume in New Orleans on November 7, a shift from an earlier decision to reopen in January. Much had changed since the earlier decision. Families with homes to return to were eager to get back and, in many cases, willing to house other students. Students were homesick for their embattled city and friends, and some businesses were calling employees home.

The last days together were marked in Grand Coteau and Houston by ceremonies blending memories and traditions. At an assembly at Duchesne, Sister Dunn, sporting Mardi Gras beads as a “symbol of solidarity,” recalled urging faculty at the beginning of the school year to “count our blessings” and avoid negative thinking. “And New Orleans has been such a blessing to us,” she said. “When they came, we worried about how we were going to fit them into our classrooms and make them feel welcome. Now we are realizing what a big hole it

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*At left, students and faculty members from the Rosary's upper school-in-diaspora in Grand Coteau pose for a school photo with a school bus from New Orleans as backdrop. Below left, Geraldine Jones, a member of the Thensted Center staff, holds baby Anjae at her baptism in Grand Coteau. The baby's mother, Angela Collins, looks on.*

will be when they are gone.” Sibyl Stumm, the Rosary’s student body president, was looking forward to a lunch for seniors, where New Orleans “po-boys” and mufulletas would be served to students at Duchesne.

In Grand Coteau, the Feast of Mater included traditions from the Rosary, and Rosary middle school students were preparing a program about New Orleans for their “country cousins.” It would begin with a jazz rendition of “Just a Closer Walk with Thee” and end with “Christmas in New Orleans,” a hope-filled song that names some of the things residents cherish about their city. Between songs, Rosary middle school girls planned to list the ways students at Grand Coteau had modeled the five goals of Sacred Heart education in recent weeks.



For example, eighth graders would talk about how “an active faith in God” had been enfolded in open-armed hospitality. Seventh graders, focusing on “social awareness that impels to action,” would pledge to help meet concrete needs of other hurricane victims after returning home, just as many of their own needs had been met by their hosts.

### More to life

The day after Tim Burns’ announcement, a large sign emblazoned with a rainbow was posted in one of the satellite buildings in Grand Coteau. Sister Lieux said it had been inspired by a real rainbow she had seen the day of the announcement. The next morning, during prayer, she had taught students to sing “Rainbow,” a song composed by the Dameans, a Catholic musical group that, ironically, got its start in the basement of a New Orleans seminary. “A rainbow makes a promise that life is here to stay; Promise means there’s more to life than what we know today . . . .”

By early December, 568 students had returned to the Rosary nearly 200 short of pre-Katrina enrollment, with another seventy-seven expected by January. Baby Anjae had been baptized in Grand Coteau, and the Thensted Center’s evacuees had moved on, most of them back to New Orleans, where some were living in FEMA-provided trailers.

Lynne Neitzschman, director of counseling at the Rosary, was keeping watch on the dark side, deeply aware of how hard

it would be, even for those with relatively intact homes, to go back to a city that lacked the infrastructures that make life run smoothly. “There is a profound grief we are dealing with here,” she had said in late October. “It’s not only the loss of things, but loss of a city, loss of a way of life and, for some of us, loss of pride in our community.”

Noting that some Rosary families had experienced minimal loss, while for others losses were near total, she worried about the process of healing. “I am anxious about how we can grow from this. How do we use our strength and power and spirituality to recover?”

For all who had returned to New Orleans by December, life was vastly different from before. All over the city, people were dealing with loss, including, at the most extreme, loss of family members. As for the Rosary, Tim Burns noted that, though the buildings had escaped severe damage, the disruption had placed a severe financial strain on the school.

Clearly, for all, much hard work – physical, emotional, psychological – lay ahead. But Burns was among those looking at the rainbow. “There’s a great spirit here at the school,” he said; “a beautiful sense of community.”

Sister Lieux added, “All around us, there are signs of hope. The azaleas are in bloom on campus and our volleyball team won the state championship after practicing and competing at Grand Coteau. We have learned, and continue to learn, to find blessings in the small things of our lives.” ❖



*Josephine Navarro, music teacher at Our Lady of Guadalupe in Houston, teaches kindergarten students hand motions to a song. The boy in the center of the second row is a hurricane evacuee.*



## Sharing an exile

### A disaster reshapes communities, hearts and minds

By Beatrice Brennan, RSCJ

A group of Religious of the Sacred Heart from New Orleans and Grand Coteau, Louisiana, sat down together recently to reflect on what had happened to us in the weeks since Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast. As we talked quietly about what the experience had been like, it became clear that, though it had been different for each of us, none of us would ever be the same.

RSCJ who had fled New Orleans admitted to feeling numb, stripped of customary roles and routines, suspended between a world that had vanished forever and one whose shape was yet to unfold. In different ways, both in personal relationships and vicariously, through the media, we have shared the anguish of the thousands too poor to flee, then forced to go – left with nothing to return to and little to say about the shape the future will take.

We found that the best way to avoid feeling helpless was to pitch in, to do whatever we could to help. Activity was therapeutic, and hosts and guests alike did their part with zeal and good spirit.

The Thensted Center, an outreach center to poor people in Grand Coteau, where RSCJ have ministered for decades, welcomed thirty-five members of one extended family, some of whom had been airlifted from their mother's rooftop by helicopter. Willing arms set up beds in made-over rooms on the second floor, lifted crates of donated canned goods and clothing and arranged for a hospital bed to be set up in the living area for a family member unable to climb the stairs. Male evacuees, one of whom is a carpenter, performed all sorts of needed chores around the building, while the women used their cooking skills to replenish workers' energies and feed their own families from tables laden with delicious meals.

Food has always been important in Acadiana as an expression of hospitality. As Sister Barbara Moreau put it, "We may not have much, but everything we have we share." This spirit prevailed, even as the number of children from New Orleans received at the Academy of the Sacred Heart in Grand Coteau exceeded the number regularly enrolled in the school.



*Sister Elizabeth Renard examines one of dozens of "flood buckets" containing supplies for hurricane victims. The buckets consumed a large section of an activity room at Thensted Center.*

Sister Jane McKinlay, one of the evacuees, found fellow football fans at the Thensted Center with whom to watch the Saints play on Sunday afternoons. She had opportunities, too, to bring people together for quiet sharing about themselves and their spiritual journeys, a ministry she has practiced in New Orleans.

The landscape of Grand Coteau itself has been part of the healing process, with pastures to walk in, mockingbirds to offer a chorus of greetings in the morning, a choice of daily Eucharistic families to pray with, and above all, simple, unsophisticated people happy to make room for yet one more.

The RSCJ in host communities agreed that the experiences of recent weeks had both stretched and enriched our lives. Sitting elbow to elbow around the table, we plumbed major social questions in the light of new experiences. At close quarters (in line-ups for showers, for example) we came to see how possible it is to live happily without so many of the

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amenities of American life to which are accustomed.

It has been a grace to talk one-on-one with each other, with the evacuees at Thensted and the Academy and with people around the neighborhood, where families

both well-to-do and poor have taken in as many as they could. Sister Maureen Little, who welcomed not only seventy new children in the elementary school, but her own mother and other family members to her community home, said that, for her, the word “love” had reached new depths.

Another RSCJ from Grand Coteau, Sister Betty Renard, singled out one-on-one conversations as the crux of her experience in recent weeks. “Statistics about disasters across the globe will never again be just numbers to me,” she said. “They will be about thousands of heart-rending stories that must be told one by one by one.”

Sister Muriel Cameron, another of the evacuees, said that the need to serve “as an anchor for others” while “feeling like an autumn leaf blowing in the wind” had rooted her more firmly than ever in God’s strong presence and unflinching love.

None of us has felt in any way “special,” just more and more at one with all the ordinary folks who have reached out to one another so graciously during this extraordinary time. Many agreed that familiar Scripture texts have come alive in new ways during these days, such as this one by the Psalmist:



Mounds of ruined household furnishings line the walk in front of houses in a formerly flooded area of New Orleans.



Sister Bea Brennan of Grand Coteau, center, talks with Sister Muriel Cameron, right, campus minister at the Rosary in New Orleans, and Diane Darling, alumnae director in Grand Coteau. The three are standing in the parking lot of a satellite campus for Rosary students in Grand Coteau.

“When from our exile God brings us home again, we’ll think we are dreaming.” (Psalm 126)

The dreaming began on October 17, as Sisters Mary Blish and Carmela Parisi set out from Grand Coteau for Napoleon Avenue, their community home in New Orleans, to prepare the house for the others. In Grand Coteau, too, a feeling of new life was in the air, both among ourselves and at Thensted, where a baby girl had been born to one of the evacuees.

Gratitude is on everyone’s lips these days and in all of our hearts. As one woman put it, “I may have lost my house and my possessions, but I am still alive.” And in the hearts of those who have sheltered her and so many like her, prayers of immense gratitude spring up for having been graced to walk with them a while along the way.

*Sister Brennan lives in Grand Coteau, Louisiana, and volunteers at New Life Center, a residence for homeless women and children in Opelousas. Previously, she has served as headmistress of three Sacred Heart schools in the U.S. Province, taught English to children in Egypt, and worked at Little Sisters of the Assumption Family Health Service in New York City, a community-based agency where several RSCJ serve.*

# *Smile the Sun Around My Heart*

A collection of poems by Anna Mae Marheineke, RSCJ

The poems on these pages are taken from a book of poetry by Anna Mae Marheineke, RSCJ, published by the alumni association of the Academy of the Sacred Heart in St. Charles, Missouri.



Sister Marheineke, a native of St. Charles, taught at the academy there for many years, as well as at Sacred Heart schools in Cincinnati, New Orleans and Grand Coteau, Louisiana. Since 2005, she has lived at Oakwood Convent of the Sacred Heart, a retirement center for the U.S. Province in Atherton, California.

Copies of the book may be purchased from the Advancement Office at the school in St. Charles, 636-946-5632, for \$20 each.

## ***Southern Sunset (At Grand Coteau)***

Just above me a new April moon  
held cupped in its crescent a star,  
    while the sun's last ray  
    made a rosy delay,  
sending opal and mother-of-pearl to play  
on the slim white moon's curved bar.

I whistled goodnight to a cardinal who called  
an answer from a dark-branched pine.

    All twilight was fraught  
    with the beauty I'd caught  
from a moon-cupped star and a tall pine taut  
against a sky like Burgundy wine.

## ***On Sonnets***

They are like bridges.  
Strong. Designed.  
With piles placed here  
and here. So,  
and no otherwise. Formed  
for years of passage in firm  
full treads. No  
flinging up in chance,  
in casual span. Term  
here of plan  
and peaceful mastery.  
Mystery, too, of beauty  
and long lines of light  
that lift one out among  
an infinite forever of ease  
toward stars and sun,  
toward all that is  
limitless and unbounded  
bright.

### *A Christmas Prayer*

Almighty God –  
Let the gracious spirit of the little  
Child, as it knocks at the hearts of men,  
enter my life and bless it. Let duty  
become touched with beauty and  
justice be forgotten in love. Let my  
obligations be changed to opportunities.  
Let my ears hear the cry of the needy  
and my heart feel the love of the  
unlovely. Give me strength, not to do  
great things, but to do small things  
graciously. Heal the wounds of  
misunderstanding, jealousy or regret  
that scar my heart, and let the  
gentle air of the dear Christmas spirit  
touch my life. Grant me peace  
with the world and peace in my own  
heart that those I love and those  
whom I may help may have sweet  
joy and loving trust. Amen.



*Sister Marheineke sits at her desk  
in this vintage photo.*

### *Warning*

Be careful, Lord, this year.  
We may not let you in.  
We fear  
the color of your skin,  
your poverty,  
and do not wholly trust  
your speech, whose ambiguity  
can irritate  
those who want things  
black or white, not gray.  
Peace and the sword  
must not cohabit  
any more than may  
the wolf and lamb,  
the hawk and dove  
relate in love.  
So state  
your platform well before  
you come knocking  
at our door.  
The scar  
of sin sits deep  
in church and state,  
and inconsolable Rachels weep  
lost sons, sons lost in war,  
in drugs, in alcohol and crime,  
in misplaced dreams.  
O bid all time  
stand still  
among our petty human schemes.  
And if you dare and will,  
step quietly again  
into our hearts. Their pain  
will be familiar.  
Now you will know  
how far  
and where to go.



### *“And We Saw His Glory”*

Not miniaturized in a capital:  
gem of gold and reds,  
round bright heads  
of cherubs for suitable setting.  
Ivory-paged monastic manuscript,  
netting, let us say, a fortune of  
twenty thousand or so.  
No.  
This is glory stripped  
to naked poverty, not even tent,  
not  
stable, Shekinah, for sheltering.  
Midnight angels must spear  
with their awful holiness  
the utter dark  
that cloaks the clot  
of ugly human suffering;  
must fear  
the God who dares enshrine  
his Glory in man’s stark  
frail heart. Contradictory sign!

### *Life*

That is what the Resurrection  
is all about:  
dawn race to the tomb, earthquake,  
sun on angels’ faces that shout  
Rejoice! Praise!  
The Lord lives! And always  
we live too and loudly call:  
Blow your Spirit through, clean  
through us. Overturn  
these rocks that are our hearts.  
Be Emmaus-Jesus and break  
daily bread with us. Burn  
prophecy-come-true on our  
every waking Easter. Surprise  
our dulled wits with “Here I am! Don’t fear!”  
And eyes – ours – yearn  
to fix you, O Risen Lord,  
forever fast, forever here. ✦



*Sister Marheineke enjoys a ride on a motor scooter and talks with a faculty member in the library of Academy of the Sacred Heart in St. Charles.*

# Hurricane déjà vu

## 1926 hurricane forces school in Louisiana to close

By Frances Gimber, RSCJ

Dear readers: Below is an abbreviated account by Frances Gimber, RSCJ, paraphrasing the Annual Letters and house journal of St. Michael's Convent, of two hurricanes that struck Louisiana in 1926, resulting in the closing of St. Michael's as a boarding school for American students. The full account, along with other historical articles by Sister Gimber, can be found at [www.rscj.org](http://www.rscj.org), "From the Archives."

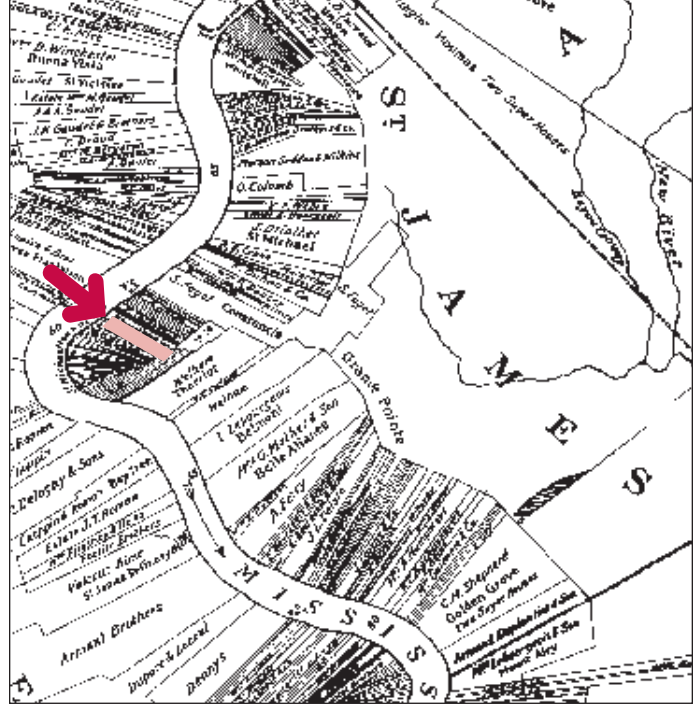
It is August, 1926. Our house in Convent, Louisiana, St. Michael's, has just celebrated its centenary. "The dear old house, entirely repainted, is shiningly beautiful. The study halls and classrooms are all newly renovated." The school children are on vacation, but the "ladies of the world" are peacefully making their annual retreat.

The Annual Letters (1924-26) describe the cataclysmic event of August 25 as follows:

"[On] the 25th of August a violent hurricane was unleashed throughout Louisiana. We had taken all the necessary precautions, but the wind, accompanied by torrential rain, grew stronger and stronger by the hour. Our retreatants took refuge in their dormitory. We had the idea that two religious should stay up in turn to warn of danger. Towards ten o'clock, the hurricane winds reached 100 miles an hour. Our big house seemed to be shaking on its foundations; the chimneys fell destroying the roof, the tiles of which flew off like so many scraps of paper. Water flowed in through all the holes. The chapel was full of water; a broken stained glass window was letting in both wind and water.

About two o'clock in the morning the winds began to die down, but what a spectacle met our eyes at dawn: our super-pecan and walnut trees were lying on the lawn like stricken giants; the garden was torn up and covered with roof tiles; sheets of metal from the roof were all over the ground. That was what had become of the beauty of St. Michael's!

It was the third day of the retreat; the priest encouraged the ladies to thank God that their lives had been spared; then he advised them to go home, advice that they did not need as they were all anxious about their families, and so the retreat closed. Reverend Mother Vicar [Reid] arrived two days later [and] decided that the boarding school would not reopen that semester. She advised parents to send their daughters to Grand Coteau or the Rosary. A small community stayed to take care



Persac's map showing the Mississippi River region where St. Michael's stood. From Plantations on the Mississippi River from Natchez to New Orleans, 1858, Pelican Publishing Co, Inc., 1931.

of the two free schools, one for white children [fifty-eight students] and one for children of color [sixty-five students]. We remain confident in the Heart of Jesus and in the decisions of our First Mother."

There were forty-two religious in the community at the time; the boarders would have numbered fifty-three. The small group that remained carried on throughout the academic year 1926-27 teaching in the day schools and supervising repairs. The house journal expresses their joy on December 12, the day the chapel was ready for use again. The boarding school did not reopen for the second semester.

On April 17, Easter Sunday, the convent annalist records the effects of a second hurricane. "From Good Friday on the river began to take on frightening proportions. The Mississippi and its tributaries overflowed causing disastrous flooding. Families were ruined; others perished trying to escape the floods. There were miracles of charity and devotedness. Planes passed over frequently surveying the scene and bringing aid." This time St. Michael's does not appear to have suffered.

Finally, from the journal entry on June 21 we learn what "the First Mother" decided: "Reverend Mother announced that our dear house would not be closed but would become the center of the Vicariate of Mexico. Our mothers from San Antonio [where the Mexican nuns had taken refuge from persecution] with their boarding school will take possession of the house. We rejoice that our house will continue to be dedicated to a work of the Society, but we feel the sacrifice of leaving this place that is so dear to us." The joyful note in this account is that "the dear house" received new life as a shelter for the Mexican exiles until the end of 1931. ✦



# Join us in mission

Help us make God's love visible in the heart of the world



## How?

### VOCATIONS

If you are interested in membership in the Society, please contact  
Nancy Koke, RSCJ, Director of Vocation Ministry, [vocations@rscj.org](mailto:vocations@rscj.org)

### ASSOCIATES

If you would like to learn about the Sacred Heart Associates program for men and women  
who want to share in the mission and charism of the Society, please e-mail

Anne Byrne, RSCJ, at [abyrne@rscj.org](mailto:abyrne@rscj.org)

### FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Please consider including the Society of the Sacred Heart, U.S. Province,  
in your estate plan or your will. For more information, e-mail

Shirley Miller, RSCJ, at [smiller@rscj.org](mailto:smiller@rscj.org)

## From the Archives

The history of St. Michael's Convent can be traced to 1823, when Father Charles de la Croix, a pastor in southern Louisiana asked Bishop William DuBourg in St. Louis to send nuns to establish a new school. A group of Religious of the Sacred Heart arrived the following year, and a boarding school opened in 1826. The spacious building shown at top left was completed in 1848. It stood along the Mississippi River on 300 acres, about sixty miles upriver from New Orleans, facing a steamboat landing. Students, though mostly from the South, came from as far away as New York and California in the U.S. and from Canada, Mexico, Cuba and Central America. More than 3,700 girls were educated at St. Michael's before its closing in 1926, due in part to damage caused by a hurricane. (See page 22 for an account of the hurricane by Frances Gimber, RSCJ.) ❖



ST. MICHAEL'S, Across The Great Front LAWN



OVER THE MISSISSIPPI from Upper GALLERY



NORTH THE MOSS-MANTLED OAKS

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