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The Sacramental Nature of Community

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Since 1982, when an endowment from the Bannan family created a robust center of excellence to promote Catholic mission and values, Santa Clara University has been deeply invested in improving and enhancing “the Ignatian spirit in the whole University community: faculty, students, staff, alumni and friends.”⁵ This commitment

¹ Footnotes for page 95 are on facing page, page 94.

² Footnotes for page 95 are on facing page, page 94.

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⁵ “History,” *Santa Clara University Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education*, accessed <https://www.scu.edu/ic/about/history/>.

to community in combination with a ministry characterized by a turning inward supported by the Ignatian Exercises as early as 1550 contributed to the Jesuits' self-definition and charism, what the Jesuits refer to as their distinctive "way of proceeding."⁶ From the very beginning, Jesuits have valued engagement with community. Thus, the Santa Clara Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education, which emerged in 2005 from a union of the Bannan Institute and the Arrupe Center for Community-based Learning, carries on the earliest traditions of the Jesuit charism and ways of proceeding.

Engagement with the community, Jesuits learned early on, requires a sensitivity to community needs and an openness to change as community needs change. It also benefits from awareness of changes in philosophical perspectives. John O'Malley argues that the early engagement of the Society with institutions of social assistance is evidence of "a growing faith in the sustaining power of institutions and a concomitant commitment to them."⁷ Moreover, the early documents related to the Jesuit way of proceeding provide evidence of influences from Renaissance humanism. O'Malley writes, "In the bull of 1550 the list of ministries ends by commending anything that contributes to 'the common good,'" a shift from earlier vocabulary directly or indirectly derived from the Bible or from traditional Christian usage. The focus on the common good, a concern for this world and its betterment, likely derives from 16th century humanist philosophy, as O'Malley notes, and implies an openness regarding what might be included in future 'works of charity': a shift away from exclusively evangelical goals toward the common good for all humanity.⁸ For example, six of the fifteen goals envisioned for Jesuit schools in 1551 specify benefits for the cities or towns in which the schools are located. The fifteenth goal is directed to "everybody's profit and advantage": "Those who are now only students will grow up to be pastors, civic officials, administrators of justice, and will fill other

⁶ John W. O'Malley, "Five Missions of the Jesuit Charism," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 38, no.4 (2006): 18.

⁷ Ibid, 20.

⁸ Ibid, 21.

important posts to everybody's profit and advantage."⁹ Significantly, this goal was emphasized by *Gaudium et Spes*, the Vatican II encyclical that in 1965 addressed itself “not only to the sons of the Church and to all who invoke the name of Christ, but to the whole of humanity.”¹⁰ Moreover, changes in the ways the Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education now pursues its goals can be seen as part of a long continuum of adapting Jesuit education to the needs of the local and global communities Santa Clara University engages with. Signature elements of the changes include extending the opportunities of the Arrupe Center for Community-based Learning to an Experiential Learning for Social Justice (ELSJ) requirement for all undergraduates in 2009 and launching the Thriving Neighbors Initiative (TNI) in 2013.¹¹

⁹ O'Malley specifies, “The goal, moreover, could have been written by Erasmus, Pier Paolo Vergerio the Elder, or any of the other theorists about the program of studies promoted by Renaissance humanists, “Five Missions,” 21-22.

¹⁰ *Pastoral Constitution On The Church In The Modern World: Gaudium Et Spes, Promulgated By His Holiness, Pope Paul Vi On December 7, 1965*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html. See especially no. 26. Melanie M. Morey and John J. Pideret, *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis*, 9-10, discuss divisions in the Catholic Church related to *Gaudium et Spes*; some theologians believe the Church has not done enough to achieve the goals of Vatican II, while others believe the Church has gone too far from its traditional understanding of moral theology. Similar divisions can be seen in responses to differences between the leadership of Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis.

¹¹ The Ignatian Center website provides a brief history of growth and development between the years before its founding as the Bannan Institute in 1982 and the launch of TNI, a broad-scale community-based learning addition to the Arrupe portfolio. Rooted in a faith that does justice, TNI builds on earlier partnerships with local community organizations whose members and clients serve as co-educators for Santa Clara University students. Informed by and in conversation with Catholic social tradition, the Center facilitates community-based learning opportunities that underscore commitments to the common good, universal human dignity,

This essay will focus on ways the ELSJ Core Curriculum requirement and TNI enact the Jesuit way of proceeding to promote dialogue and critical engagement with underserved communities in order to contribute to the common good. Particularly important in these community-engagement practices is attention to the distinction Jewish theologian Martin Buber draws between the subject-object knowing, *I – It* relationships, characteristic of traditional university learning, and *I -Thou* relationships possible through “genuine meeting,” “genuine dialogue,” leading to wholeness and “real living,” “actual life.”¹² Buber’s description of *I - Thou* encounters is reminiscent of the relational encounters with God outlined in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. Both Buber and Ignatius value “so-called ‘objective knowledge.’” In *Philosophical Interrogations* Buber specifies, “I have often indicated how much I prize science, so-called ‘objective knowledge.’ Without it there is no orientation in the world of ‘things’ or of ‘phenomena,’ hence no orienting connection with the space-time sphere in which we have to pass our individualized life on earth.”¹³ However, without *I-Thou* relationships, according to Buber’s thinking, individuals are limited to being “an ‘object among objects.’”¹⁴ Bryan Stevenson, Founder and Executive Director of Equal Justice Initiative, advocates a similar idea when he emphasizes the

justice as participation, and solidarity with marginalized communities. <https://www.scu.edu/ic/programs/thriving-neighbors/>.

¹² Kenneth Paul Kramer, *Martin Buber’s I and Thou: Practicing Living Dialogue*, provides a useful comparison of Ronald Gregor Smith’s and Walter Kaufmann’s translations of Buber’s German in a “pivotal passage, delineating the undivided wholeness of genuine meeting (in the sense of engaging and being engaged) [from which] “the rest of Buber’s *I and Thou* proceeds” (21). Smith translates “All real living is meeting”; Kaufmann translates, “All actual life is encounter.”

¹³ Kenneth Paul Kramer, *Martin Buber’s I and Thou: Practicing Living Dialogue* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2003), 26.

¹⁴ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 17; *I and Thou: A New Translation with a Prologue, 'I and You' and Notes*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 68.

importance of “proximity,” “getting close to people and the actual problem.”¹⁵ We propose that the principles of community-engaged teaching and scholarship, project-based learning, and participatory action research¹⁶ espoused by ELSJ courses and TNI promote the common good and animate the mission of the University in ways that can be understood as a sacrament of community, closely related to the sacrament of marriage. Community-based engagement goes beyond supporting the Catholic identity of many of our students and community partner organizations to support the formation of responsible citizens who will contribute to the common good.¹⁷

The Experiential Learning for Social Justice (ELSJ) Requirement and the Common Good

As might be expected, Santa Clara’s transition from optional community-based learning supported by the Arrupe Center to requiring all undergraduates to complete the ELSJ requirement

¹⁵ Bryan Stevenson, “The Opposite of Poverty is Justice,” *YouTube* (June 2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=As8baXNEgRQ>.

¹⁶ Jarg Bergold and Stefan Thomas begin the introduction to their 2012 article “Participatory Research Methods: A Methodological Approach in Motion” with this statement: “Participatory research methods are geared towards planning and conducting the research process *with* those people whose life-world and meaningful actions are under study. Consequently, this means that the aim of the inquiry and the research questions develop out of the convergence of two perspectives—that of science *and* of practice. In the best case, both sides benefit from the research process.” *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 13.1 (January 2012), <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1801/3334>. Participatory action research has become a widely known methodology in the social sciences over the last century, with a journal, *Educational Action Research*, devoted to it. Background is provided by Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart, and Rhonda Nixon in *The Action Research Planner* (Dordrecht, Springer, 2014), 4.

¹⁷ The spring 2017 issue of *Conversations in Jesuit Higher Education*, with its focus on difficult conversations, and the fall 2017 issue’s focus on truth and justice for all underscore the importance of Jesuit commitment to identify formation extending beyond Catholicism to the common good.

was challenging. Administrative commitment to improving and enhancing “the Ignatian spirit of the whole University community” was reflected in the decision to hire a full-time staff member to assist the Core Director with administration of the new requirement and to teach and assess student learning in ELSJ courses. This position was located within Undergraduate Studies (under Academic Affairs) to signal a firm commitment to academically rigorous community-based learning. The ELSJ Faculty Core Committee developed challenging learning outcomes related to the goals of civic engagement, diversity, and social justice to be carefully integrated into the curriculum of each course approved to meet this requirement. These student learning outcomes address affective as well as cognitive and behavioral dimensions of students’ learning. Students are expected to demonstrate that they recognize the importance of civic engagement benefiting underserved populations, appreciate the value of alternate perspectives and worldviews, and understand the structural underpinnings of social injustice, including their own and others’ relative privilege and marginalization. In other words, the ELSJ requirement aims to provide the proximity Bryan Stevenson advocates, the *I – Thou* relationships described by Buber through encounters in community placements. Although the dialogue and critical community engagement sometimes could be uncomfortable, it could result in transformational learning for those involved.

Fundamental to the function and success of the ELSJ Core requirement is the close and ongoing partnership with the Arrupe Weekly Engagement Program. The large majority of the 70+ ELSJ Core courses offered each year involve participation with Arrupe’s community partners selected based on how students’ experience with that partner will foment their learning of the rest of the course content.¹⁸ Because ELSJ Core courses are offered within many disciplines

¹⁸ The community partners are listed on the Arrupe section of the Ignatian Center website: <https://www.scu.edu/ic/programs/arrupe-weekly-engagement/community-partners/>. They generally are local non-profit organizations concerned with issues such as education, healthcare, immigration, disabilities, or homelessness.

and comprise varied theoretical and conceptual frameworks, the curation of the community-based learning component requires close communication and planning between course instructors and Arrupe staff as well as close attention to integration of the ELSJ Core learning outcomes. Without this bridge between Undergraduate Studies, instructors offering courses, the Arrupe Weekly Engagement Program, and the community partners, SCU would not have had the necessary infrastructure to implement best practices in community-based learning pedagogy in the context of a Core requirement for all students.

Another key feature of the ELSJ Core requirement is the attention to deep, actionable, and continuing direct and indirect assessment of student learning. ELSJ was one of the first areas within the Core curriculum to translate the articulated learning outcomes to an assessment rubric. In its present iteration, the assessment rubric is largely influenced by two American Association of Colleges & Universities VALUE rubrics and vetted for internal validity on our campus by faculty teaching in the area. Direct assessments of student work products are conducted periodically using this rubric, and indirect assessments, using Arrupe's quarterly student learning survey and National Survey Student Engagement (NSSE) and Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) national survey data, are also examined at regular intervals by Undergraduate Studies, the Arrupe Weekly Engagement Program, and our Assessment Office. Most importantly, these offices regularly "close the assessment loop" by engaging in conversations with teaching faculty about curricular improvement informed by the assessment data and with our community partners about the challenges and opportunities created through the student engagement.

The terrain of the common good within ELSJ Core courses involves maintaining mutual benefits for students and community partners' clients. The articulation and measurement of social justice-oriented student learning outcomes allows us to track and improve students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral growth toward these outcomes. The Ignatian pedagogy rooted in experiential learning and the encounters

and proximity made possible by the ELSJ Core courses contribute to students' vocational development and identity formation in ways that are largely informed by Catholic social teaching, but not limited solely to Catholic interpretations within on-campus classroom and the community "classroom" spaces.

The Thriving Neighbors Initiative and the Common Good

The Ignatian Center articulated its rationale for TNI in the 2014 *Case for Support* saying, "SCU's longstanding Jesuit, Catholic tradition of working to foster successful, healthy communities through programs like Thriving Neighbors is part of a deeply rooted institutional commitment to a more just and equitable world."¹⁹ Building on the 27 year history of strong university-community partnerships that had been cultivated and nurtured by the Arrupe Weekly Engagement Program, TNI generates opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to build on the single-quarter required ELSJ experience and other short-term voluntary Arrupe-sponsored service-learning experiences as part of Santa Clara University's prolonged and intentional engagement with the Washington Neighborhood, a community in San Jose comprised largely of immigrants living close to the federal poverty level. The participatory action research fostered by Thriving Neighbors facilitates faculty, staff, and student engagement with our community partners that extends beyond the limits of a 10-week term. Over the past decade, place-based initiatives such as Thriving Neighbors have been gaining prominence as vehicles for meaningful university-community engagement within the overlapping contexts of teaching, research and service.

Grounded in "right relationship," respect for the human dignity of community members, and a spirit of mutuality, the reciprocal, intimate connections formed between SCU students, faculty, staff

¹⁹ Michael McCarthy, *Case for Support*, Ignatian Center unpublished internal document (2014).

and local community residents involved in TNI aim to transcend cultural barriers, narrow the gap of socioeconomic marginalization, and bring about personal transformation, spiritual healing, and wholeness for everyone involved. For example, Anthony Hascheff, who graduated from SCU in 2015 with a major in Finance and a minor in Economics, drew on his business knowledge to write a report on his experiences with TNI that has been part of the initiative's continuing improvement. After graduating he worked in Paraguay as part of the Peace Corps, on a mission to make the world a better place.²⁰ According to Catholic social teaching and in line with the notion of a preferential option for the poor first articulated by Pedro Arrupe in 1968, such relationships between individuals can have the power to dismantle large-scale structures that perpetuate discrimination, advance social justice, promote the common good, and even heal the "social sin" of poverty as it exists in the surrounding world.²¹

The Ignatian Center approached the Greater Washington neighborhood of San Jose to propose the Thriving Neighbors partnership due to its demonstrated socioeconomic need and its significant, embedded locus of strong Arrupe community partner organizations within one consolidated geographic area—Greater Washington—including five predominantly Latino neighborhoods. These neighborhoods within Greater Washington have extraordinary assets and challenges: strong community organizations and seasoned community leaders in an enclave of a wealthy county, an enclave where poverty, high unemployment, and crime, including gang violence, prostitution, and drug trade, make it difficult to live healthy and productive lives. Initial guidelines for the collaboration specified that the partnership would find innovative ways to build local capacity for

²⁰ "Serving Locally, Serving Globally," *Santa Clara University Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education* (December 17, 2015), accessed <https://www.scu.edu/ic/programs/thriving-neighbors/stories/serving-locally-serving-globally.html>.

²¹ Gustavo Gutierrez explores this idea in *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*, 20th Anniversary Edition. Foreword by Henri Nouwen (MaryKnoll, NY:Orbis) 1984, 2003.

entrepreneurship, expanded educational choice, healthy living, and more. The guidelines also specified that Thriving Neighbors will bring SCU schools, departments, and community programs together with neighborhood residents, leaders, businesses, schools, and government to create mutually beneficial, interconnected and multidisciplinary solutions. Guided by this mandate and employing the pedagogy of authentic, high-impact instruction in university-community-engagement,²² the Ignatian Center began its partnership with Greater Washington by developing and supporting teams of SCU faculty, students and community residents to engage in dialogue related to improving educational choice and expanding pathways to prosperity for community residents. These dialogues similarly probed questions about how community members might support the core values and goals of the University by serving as co-educators of SCU students.²³

²² The Association of American Colleges and Universities includes experiential learning in its statement on High Impact Practices. In 2008 George D. Kuh's *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*, published by the American Association of Colleges & Universities, included service learning as one of the first five high-impact practices identified as significant for intentional and engaged student learning.

²³ The start-up strategy for TNI specified, TNI is an engaged teaching, scholarship and sustainable development initiative that links Santa Clara University with the Greater Washington (GW) community in San Jose, a neighborhood comprised largely of Latino immigrants living close to the Federal Poverty Line. Together, with this community of talented and resilient individuals, SCU is developing projects that yield mutually beneficial outcomes. TNI's mutually articulated goals are to:

1. Build local capacity for expanded educational choice in GW such that children enter kindergarten healthy and ready to learn, that students are supported and successful throughout elementary, middle and high school, and that they graduate from high school ready for college and careers
2. Improve pathways to prosperity for community members by engaging with community partners to address health, legal and economic disparities with the intention of supporting children in their learning process and
3. Engage the University's students, faculty, and staff in partnerships with GW residents, businesses, community leaders, and organizations

As with the ELSJ requirement, implementation was challenging and assessment was invaluable. In the fall of 2013, an assessment of community needs conducted by Ignatian Center staff in collaboration with faculty and staff from San Jose State University resulted in the publication of *Greater Washington: Voices of the Community Report*.²⁴ On the heels of this assessment, in March and April of 2014, SCU conducted its own series of meetings with Washington residents affiliated with the Madre a Madre parent organization at Washington Elementary School. This school was chosen as a cornerstone partner for Thriving Neighbors due to its high concentration of parents engaged as active volunteers with the school, surrounding community, and Madre a Madre as well as the strong partnership that had been previously established with the school's principal through SCU's Arrupe program. Despite careful attention to the program goals and values, on one occasion, SCU staff became saddened and ashamed when they witnessed Washington staff expressing in a meeting with close to 80 members of Madre a Madre present the need to submit to SCU's financial authority. Such overt demonstrations of the relational power imbalance between the university and its community-based partner alarmed TNI strategic planners from the community and the university.

In *I and Thou*, Buber argues that humans as individuals and as social groups are inclined to approach relationships through *experience*. When *experiencing* one another, humans treat one another as objects to be used and manipulated for one's own gratification. Buber calls such relationships "*I-It*" relationships

to promote mutual learning, critical dialogue and transformational relationships through collaborative teaching, participatory action-research-based scholarship, and sustainable program development innovation.

An additional overarching goal is that all children from the Greater Washington neighborhood will graduate from high school prepared for post-secondary education.

²⁴ Mariacarla Zazzaro, "Greater Washington Voices of the Community Report," *CommUniverCity: San Jose* (December 11, 2015), accessed <http://cucs.j.org/greater-washington-report/>.

explaining that they involve analyzing and managing interactions in order to produce a desired outcome. “*I-It*” relationships necessarily involve the placement of a personal and spiritual distance between the actor and the *other*, or the object being acted upon. Conversely, Buber posits the notion of the “*I-Thou*” relationship, which offers the opportunity for relational encounters (with other humans, with nature, and with God) similar to that outlined in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. Here, the individual “I” opens up to the possibility of becoming whole through relationship with another. Leaders of TNI recognized that they had unwittingly undermined the goal of relational encounters of solidarity and accompaniment, an *I-Thou* relationship, and were engaged in the power imbalance of an *I-It* relationship. When university-community partnerships are transactional in nature, in other words, when they involve the use of the community as an urban “lab” devoid of relational dignity, they thus further marginalize community members by objectifying them. One might say that the university is distancing itself and enacting the *I-It* relationship toward the community. One might also say the university has lost the advantage of proximity that Bryan Stevenson argues is key to overcoming injustice. Only when the SCU-Washington relationship is proximate and fosters *I-Thou* relationships, can the learning and experiences be transformational according to the Jesuit way of proceeding. University and community members have to guard against the human inclination to seek safety in distance and unequal power relationships and choose instead to “walk in accompaniment” with one another while promoting relational dignity. Then it becomes possible to engage in a sacrament of community with parallels to the sacrament of marriage and what Bernard Cooke describes as a sacrament of friendship.

In *Christian Marriage: Basic Sacrament*, Cooke writes, “Sacraments are meant to be a special avenue of insight into the reality of God; they are meant to be words of revelation. And the sacramentality of human

love and friendship touches the most basic level of this revelation.”²⁵ Further, in “Christian Marriage as a Sacrament,” Theodore J. Mackin explains the idea of sacramental friendship another way when he states, “All of Creation is an expression of God’s life, Love, and creative power; the world itself is a symbol or sacrament of the divine.”²⁶ As TNI has matured, participants have experienced community fraught with challenges and opportunities similar to those of friendship and marriage. When proximity and *I-Thou* relationships are cultivated, the possibilities for transformation of individuals and communities take on sacramental qualities. As TNI has developed over the past four years, the university-community relationship has experienced a variety of relational encounters that at times could have been seen as either transactional (*I-It*) or transformational (*I-Thou*). Despite difficult episodes of growing pains and transactional tensions, the sacramental friendships cultivated by this university-community partnership have endured and prospered.

For example, as the SCU-Washington-Madre a Madre partnership grew in its first three years to include over twenty programs co-designed by SCU faculty, staff, college students and Washington parents, interpersonal conflict sometimes undermined the ongoing enthusiastic participation of both the university and community partners. Competition between Washington school staff and SCU students, faculty, and staff for the time and attention of parents sometimes moved relationships into power-struggles. Furthermore, efforts to engage in continuous program improvement, strategic growth, and spiritual solidarity were at times draining for all involved.

Despite these difficulties, or perhaps because of measures taken to maintain *I-Thou* relationships, when asked by an outside market research firm to explain the Ignatian Center’s mission for TNI, parents in Madre a Madre stated that the Center mission was to “be

²⁵ Bernard Cooke, “Christian Marriage: Basic Sacrament,” in *Perspectives on Marriage*, ed. Kieran Scott and Michael Warren, 3rd ed. (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 73.

²⁶ Theodore J. Mackin, *Christian Marriage as a Sacrament*, ed. Frederick J. Parrella, (Unpublished Manuscript, Santa Clara University, 1999-2017).

loving and promote unity.” Children in the Washington schools have expressed similar sentiments. Describing the unveiling of a mural created by third and fourth graders with the help of a local artist, a Washington school teacher said, “You could see love in the smiling faces of the third and fourth graders in our after-school program yesterday... when they unveiled the vibrant community mural that they painted on the outside of our portable classroom with a local artist.” A student said, “The mural is going to change the community because the mural is love ... it brings beauty to our world—it also brings friendship.” Other students expressed opinions about the symbolism in the mural and their futures: “The symbol that I relate to is the books because when I grow up I want to be a scientist and I know that I have to study to be one.” Another said, “The hummingbird represents freedom because it can fly anywhere...I appreciate living in the US because I have freedom.”²⁷

Additionally, parents of children participating in the after school program led by SCU staff and students on the Washington Elementary campus expressed their gratitude with language evocative of sacramental relationship. For example, one said that the after-school program helped unify their community and make it more like a loving family.

I want to thank you first because you love our kids the way we love them and you give them support that they need and you see them... you're seeing them grow just like we are and it gives us great joy because of no one...no one takes the time to talk to the kids, to see their experiences, and have that type of contact with them...take them to the university, making them feel a part of the university, and that makes them grow a lot.

Another parent articulated ways TNI had changed her understanding of the community relationships:

²⁷ Quotes from teachers, parents, and students in the Washington neighborhood have been transcribed as stated from oral records and are included with the permission of the speakers.

In the beginning, I thought it was a help from you for the students more like academic. But I saw that you work with the community. With this, especially, with all the problems that we have in our neighborhood. And I have liked it a lot. And my expectations are that she learn a lot from you. And that she know that we people need of others. We can help one another, and I think that you are teaching her very well.

Another expressed a similar perception of community:

Well simply give thanks to you guys that are now part of our school Washington, and are part of the neighborhood, that you have made change, and more than anything you bring the young adults from the university, they interest themselves in coming and giving their knowledge. Because God gives us each a gift, and I see that you bring a lot of mentor, many young adults that help, and like I tell you again I am thankful because you have taken notice in our little school that is in need of many things. But more than anything that with your heart so big you come and even hold our children.

These participants were aware of the power of proximity and of *I-Thou* relationships without having to read Martin Buber's *I and Thou* or see Bryan Stevenson's inspirational videos.

Another theme that emerged was the transformation parents saw in their children as SCU student mentors helped the children envision themselves as prospective college students. One parent reported,

The major and best benefit is that the children dream. That the children dream, that they have the illusion and that they realize that there are a lot of things. That there are a lot of things that can bring many benefit tomorrow. Because if they stay in school, if they keep studying they will achieve their dreams.

Other parents emphasized the relationships with the students. For example, one said,

She really likes the mentors. The mentors, I think that it's [not] only mentors. What they are is counselor, they are um...they listen to their problems, they give them advice and I feel that that is something good coming from the mentors. They are brothers/sisters, they are...I don't know...cousins, people that listen to them and orient them.

Yet others emphasized relationships in terms of communication, respect for self and others, and transformed understanding of truth.

Some of the SCU students articulated similar transformational experiences. For example, one ELSJ student wrote,

I find it so inspiring to chat with them about history, modern issues, and technology, because they are so interested in learning more and sharing what they already know. I was talking to one of the children in the program about the Parthenon and she fired back that the Parthenon was strikingly similar to the Lincoln Memorial – something I had never thought about. It was so mind-blowing that a 4th grader could share something like that with me and educate me in the process rather than the other way around. I'm so pleased with the thriving neighbors initiative and the impact that it has left on its participants!²⁸

Other SCU students expressed ideas related to sacramental friendship in the following way, suggesting that students had begun to embrace the Jesuit notion of mutual transformation:

Interacting with the students at Washington Elementary and reading what Freire said about education, got me to think about the millions of Einsteins, or would have been Einsteins, given some education, this world could have received if all students were given a world class education. Societies' current situation goes completely against what my idea of an ideal world would be. In this idealized world, education would be one of the most important rituals every citizen would be a part of. The students at Washington Elementary remind me that education is the key to solving all societal problems. It is the only way to break free from this vicious cycle of poverty, racism, sexism, ignorance and any other term imaginable. The students in my group are intelligent individuals who are ready and willing to learn and improve our world if given the chance.

While this SCU student is most specific about the relevance of readings for the ELSJ course, Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,

²⁸ This and other student statements that follow are presented exactly as the students submitted them. The students provided written permission for inclusion of their responses in research and publications about ELSJ and TNI.

proximity to the children in their Washington community setting was key to the learning.²⁹

Although not all students enrolled in ELSJ courses were open to the proximity offered by TNI programs, many articulated deepened understanding in reflection essays written as part of their coursework. For some, the community experience helped translate their learning in the course from conceptual to personal. One wrote,

I know, better than I ever had, what life is like for an immigrant in the United States, more specifically those who emigrated from Mexico. [But] I am much more interested in the development of the students I got to work with. After the many weeks of working with them you really do develop a connection, and I would love to see what their futures have in store.

Through the community engagement, others became more aware of what they did not know. For instance, one student wrote about the limits of her understanding,

I have definitely encountered many differences in beliefs, values, and upbringings from the students at Washington Elementary School. Coming from a predominantly white infused community, my beliefs stem from a narrow-minded and naïve sense of the world. Because of this, I have had to be much more cautious in terms of the interactions with the elementary school students, many of who are immigrants from Mexico. I have gone into this [placement] with an open mind and acceptance of the fact that I am not necessarily going to fully understand these kids' backgrounds and beliefs. Even though I may not understand what these kids are going through, it is important that I am respectful of these differences.

At times that learning involved the experience of cognitive dissonance, as students grappled with the difficult realities impacting the lives of community members and compared these experiences to their own. Many students reflected on privilege they had not previously been aware of. One wrote,

²⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2000).

I am incredibly fortunate to be on the other side of this social justice issue. I was born in the Silicon Valley with a world of opportunity at my fingertips. In addition, the public schools where I lived were top notch, so simply attending these schools gave me an incredible advantage.... Most sombering is that I was given all of this by chance.

This student hadn't realized that Silicon Valley included enclaves such as the Washington Neighborhood, where people living in the same county experienced radically different realities.

Other students were able to get past initial impressions of their own "luck" and examine some of the complexities of structural inequality:

It is unfair that these immigrants are not provided the same rights and benefits to society that naturally born citizens are granted. It is not fair that these people are trying to seek a better life and are instead confronted with the harsh reality of poverty as soon as they settle in America. While the privileged part of society benefit from the advancements in technology, housing, income in the Silicon Valley, the marginalized only suffer more. The income disparity amongst the haves and have-nots is growing and it is clearly visible in my CBL.

While this reflection does not provide evidence of a transformational experience, it does suggest that the concepts explored through readings for the course took on greater meaning as a result of the proximity to the immigrants. Other SCU students focused in their reflections on one-directional giving characteristic of *I-It* relationships. Although clearly caring about the children, one student's reflection demonstrates the durability of this mindset:

The kids certainly need this type of interaction, as their experience with someone of my background is understandably very limited. The best moments I have encountered in this program have been instances when I was able to teach the children something that they had no idea about beforehand. I am able to share my interest in history, foreign cultures, and math with these children in a manner that peaks their interest. This serves to hopefully light a spark of curiosity within the children, so that they continue to desire to learn more and more about the outside world.

In contrast, some SCU students wrote about personal transformation in ways that suggest the Jesuit ideal of mutual transformation made possible through sacramental friendship and community. One wrote,

My time at Washington Elementary was a very powerful experience. I made new friends, explored new places, and developed a deeper understanding of myself and the world around me. Mentors and I drew with students. We talked to Washington's youth about their dreams and aspirations. We were physically involved in the painting of the Washington Elementary mural.

Others reflected on the value of breaking down initial barriers. One expressed the unexpected joy of the experience,

In my opinion this was one of the best things I've done during my time at Santa Clara University. In the beginning it was tough to get myself to go but once the barrier between the kids and I was gone it was really fun. I really started to enjoy my time there and each session went by faster and faster. I know that I will be doing something very similar to this in my future. This was an amazing experience that I will always remember.

Yet others were able to reflect more deeply on root causes and even expressed frustration over injustices that seemed unlikely to change. For instance, one student wrote,

Until there is an overhaul of the core curriculum and teaching methods employed in the country, I don't see how this issue can be resolved or mediated. I think this realization is devastating. It's frustrating to me to identify an issue that should be remedied and have no tools to do so. I believe strongly that education should teach and test a person's learning skills and mental capacity, not the circumstances that they were brought into. That is a sign of failure on the part of the education system, government, and citizens.

One student, through her learning in her ELSJ course and TNI placement, was able to articulate the complexities of charity and social justice and the troubling nature of community-based learning that is limited to a single academic quarter:

Many of the privileged sector believe in charity; that is low levels of concern for the root problem and low levels of investment in relationships. Rather than trying to find a solution to the problem, the privileged believe it's enough to donate their money and time to a one-time cause. Because this is a systemic issue, it does not help these people. In fact, it may even hinder them. I partially see our work at the CBL as a hindrance to the problem. Although I believe that Santa Clara and the students have the right intent, intent is not enough to solve the problem. We are "giving back" to the community by volunteering a few hours a week to an organization. But what happens when our work is done? We leave the problem unaddressed, just as when we arrived. This is the problem with the work we're doing with these kids. After developing relationships for the past eight weeks, we will move on with our lives and most likely forget about the experiences we had at our CBL. Unfortunately as a member of the privileged society, it is engrained into how we think: give back to the underprivileged. It does not address anything about the root of the problem or long-term ways to address it. I am not trying to claim that I have the answer or solution because if I did, this would not be an issue in our society. However, I believe we should be doing more than just charity work to give back. I believe we should address the underlying issues and develop sustainable solutions for the marginalized.

While this student clearly deepened her understanding of the challenges in addressing structural inequality, she was thinking about her role as an individual student in an ELSJ course, not about the larger impact of long-term Thriving Neighbors projects that integrate ELSJ courses and sustain meaningful relationships with communities over years.

Santa Clara University's faculty, staff, and students involved with ELSJ courses and TNI will continue to collaborate with our neighbors in the spirit of the Jesuit way of proceeding. In 16th century Europe, the collaborations were exclusively with Christians. Our 21st century collaborations involve SCU students with widely different experiences of religion and spirituality. Both *Gaudium et Spes*, the pastoral constitution from the Second Vatican Council, and Decree One from the Jesuit General Congregation 36 emphasize the responsibility of

Catholics to the greater good for all of humanity. Section three of Decree One specifies,

looking at reality with the eyes of faith, with a vision trained by the *Contemplatio*, we know that God labors in the world. We recognize the signs of God's work, of the great ministry of reconciliation God has begun in Christ, fulfilled in the Kingdom of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. GC 35 recognized this mission. The letter of Father General Adolfo Nicolás on reconciliation and the teaching of Pope Francis have given this vision greater depth, placing faith, justice, and solidarity with the poor and the excluded as central elements of the mission of reconciliation. Rather than ask what we should do, we seek to understand how God invites us – and so many people of good will – to share in that great work.³⁰

ELSJ courses and TNI at SCU offer rich opportunities for many people of good will to share in that work and perpetuate the Jesuit commitment to the common good for students of all faiths—or no faith—and extend the sacrament of community to all.

³⁰ “Decree 1: Companions in a Mission of Reconciliation and Justice,” *General Congregation 36 (Rome, October 2-November 12, 2016)*, accessed <http://jesuits.org/gc?PAGE=DTN-20170215020206>.