

2-1989

Partners

Ed DeBerri S.J.

PARTNERS

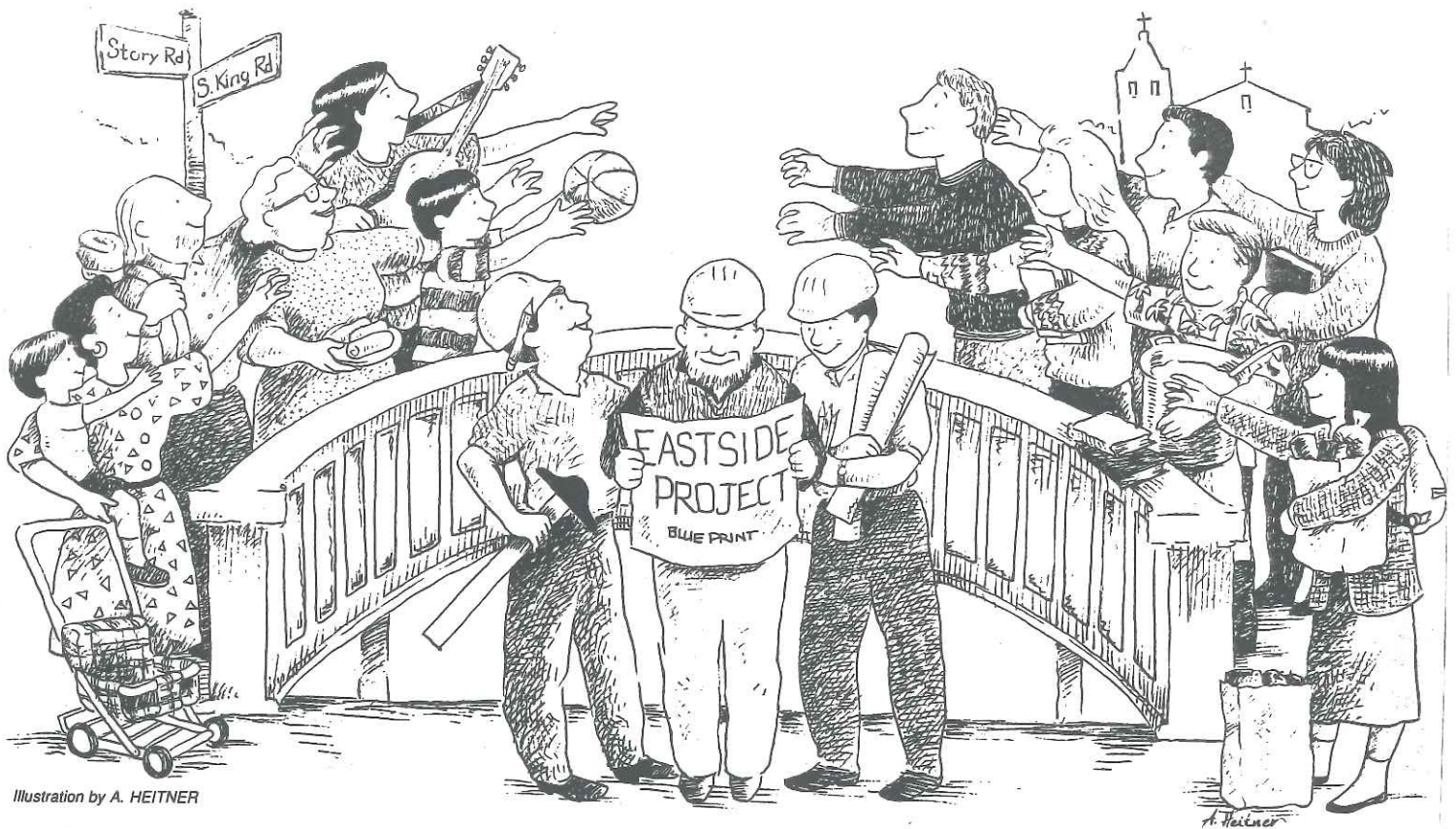


Illustration by A. HEITNER

***Santa Clara's Eastside Project
a bold attempt to intertwine
university and local community***

By Ed DeBerri, S.J.

The sun has bobbed down beyond the Pacific. Once again darkness has arrived over San Jose.

The Julian Street Inn is relatively quiet for a shelter serving the mentally ill homeless. The phone rings only sporadically. Guests lounge on tattered armchairs aligned against concrete walls. Two rows of bunks, each topped by a colorful if slightly shredded quilt, dominate the room. A dozen faded poinsettias cluster on folding tables, their dowdy leaves illuminated by fluorescent light.

Two Santa Clara University coeds weave their way through the inn. As they pause to chat with guests, their smiles and banter infect the space. Suddenly it does not seem so sullen.

Randy Skelton, a guest, appreciates the company.

"I think it's pretty good," he said. "They treat us with courtesy. It gives us a chance to talk with someone."

The young women--LeeAnn French, a junior electrical engineering major from Big Fork, Mont., and Lisa Charpontier, a sophomore psychology major from San Jose--enjoy their work.

"You meet a lot of interesting people," Charpontier said. "I've always wanted to help people."

The students are not simply volunteers, seeking to be of service or to catch a glimpse of life on the margins. They assist at Julian Street, rather, as part of their coursework, through an innovative program the university launched as a response to the Society's mission to promote justice.

The Eastside Project, established in 1985, is a partnership between Santa Clara University and the communities of East San Jose--a poor, working class area with a significant Hispanic and Southeast Asian population. The high school dropout rate approaches 60 percent, and the neighborhood is known as the PCP capital of the world.

The Eastside Project is a pedagogical tool that enables the university to integrate theory with practice and plant justice at the heart of its curriculum.

More than 300 students per year participate via courses such as Anthropology of Aging, Abnormal Psychology, Politics and Mass Media, and Advanced Spanish Conversation.

For the past two-and-one-half years the project has focused primarily on the amnesty and legalization processes resulting from the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). Students assisted with amnesty appli-

cations until May 1988, when the deadline expired. Since then they have been tutoring documented and undocumented people in English and civics.

Other placements (in addition to the Julian Street Inn) at which students can work include a center for high risk families, a day center for Hispanic senior citizens, and a pre-school for children of parents in job-training programs.

Three Jesuits, advised by a board of community activists and Santa Clara faculty and students, administer the Eastside Project. The Jesuits--Frs. Dan Germann, Sonny Manuel and Steve Privett--live in a house in East San Jose.

Fr. Germann, the director, acts as the liaison between the project and the community. Fr. Manuel teaches psychology and Fr. Privett serves in the religious studies department.

The project is designed to benefit both the university and the community by linking Santa Clara's resources with East San Jose's needs. University personnel believe the program enhances education by exposing students to an atmosphere completely different from that of the university and by facilitating the application of knowledge gleaned from textbooks and lectures to real-life situations. Community leaders say the program has already significantly benefited their neighborhoods.

"The Eastside Project is an attempt to be a force in two communities, to recognize the riches and strength in two different communities, to bring change in both communities," said Peter Miron-Conk, executive director of San Jose Urban Ministry.

"It's attempting to do that by creating institutional change in the university by having students become educated in a real way about who poor people really are, and what the impact of the social institutions is on their lives," he added.

"The basic concept is that the university is poorer without ethnic diversity, social diversity and the marginalized," Fr. Privett said.

Organizers see academic integration as key.

"Curricularly, it's building through our association with faculty members," Fr. Manuel said. "We've tried to involve lay and Jesuit colleagues."

The community becomes something like an adjunct faculty member, organizers claim.

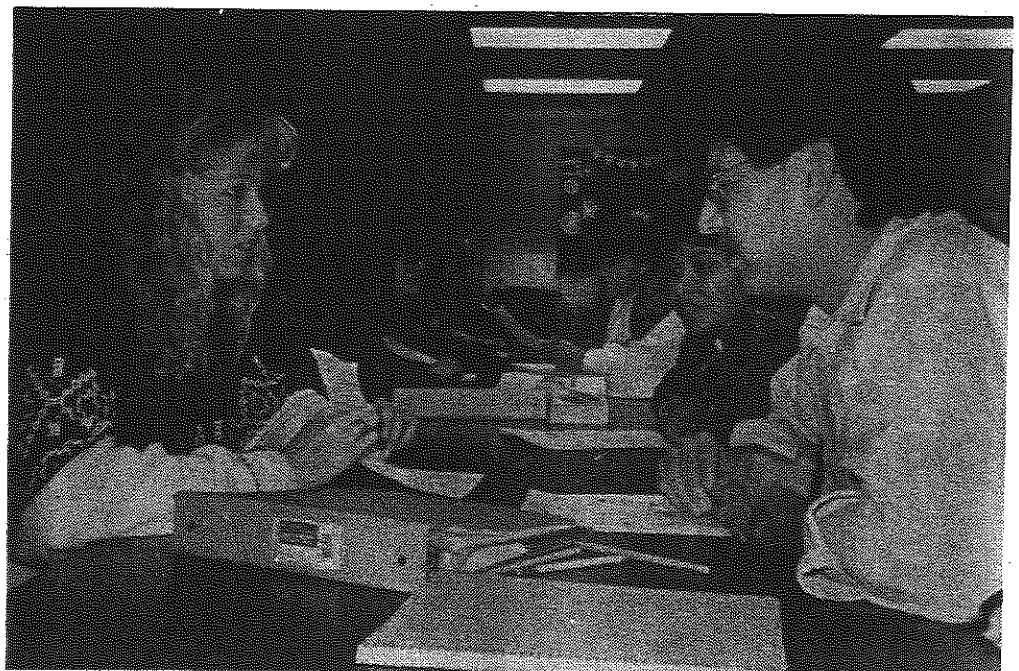
Santa Clara administrators rave about the program.

"Doing the faith-justice mission of the Society makes the university a better university. The Eastside Project is one of the ways the university as university can respond," said Fr. Charles Beirne, academic vice president. "The community widens the horizons of the university."

Fr. Beirne views the project as a natural outgrowth of the Society's mission.

"Now we're at the stage of implementing the documents of the most recent general congregations in very concrete ways," he said. "There's been a type of marinating process. Now I think we have some instincts as to how to implement them to help the university."

Fr. Paul Locatelli, Santa Clara's new president, emphasized this in his inaugural address.



Students tutor at Overfelt Adult Education Center.

Photos by ED DeBERRI, S.J.

"The Santa Clara community wants to demonstrate its commitment to this goal by helping to create an environment where people of different cultures will learn how to live and work as brothers and sisters," he said.

Community leaders think the university is doing just that.



Lisa Charpontier talks with Darrell at the Julian Street Inn.

San Jose Catholic Charities' officials credit Eastside Project volunteers with rescuing the amnesty program and enabling the organization to process more than 6,000 applications.

"Without the Eastside Project we would not have been able to maintain the program. I really don't believe the staff would have been able to pull it off," said James Purcell, executive director.

"They became the key resource and supplier of volunteers. Without the volunteers, we would not have been able to deal with so many people," he added.

Maria Picetti, program director, agreed.

"They saved us. They acted as paralegals," she said. "The students would come to the sessions at night. They'd talk to the applicants and make them feel human and warm."

Other community activists concur, pointing to the humane touch the students deliver.

"There's been quite a number of attachments made. A majority of the students who made a commitment for one quarter have opted to come back," said Judy McCoy, assistant director of the adult education program at the Overfelt Adult Center.

The center is teaching English to more than 3,000 students as part of the IRCA process.

More than 50 Eastside Project volunteers

serve as teacher aides and lead conversation instruction.

"Having volunteers in the classroom extends the arms of the teacher. It also lessens attrition in the classes," McCoy said. "We feel we're very fortunate to have the students. We feel we're the ones benefiting."

One of the agencies that thinks it gains the most from the Santa Clara presence is Gardner Children's Center. Gardner is a development center for children from low-income, mostly single-parent families.

"We really encourage undergraduate males to come here and be role models," said Frederick Ferrer, executive director. "The Santa Clara students are very reliable and responsible. They've been really present to the kids."

"We have had students come back when they don't have course requirements. They made strong commitments to individual kids."

Faculty at Santa Clara think the project enriches the courses they teach.

"The faculty who are involved are very pleased with it. It provides our students with a dimension of education that they ordinarily would not have," said Francisco Jimenez, professor of modern languages. "You have the meeting of theory and practice."

"A valuable aspect for me is the contact between middle class students and the people they're working with," said Eleanor Willemssen, chair of the psychology department. "It's more than I could ever lecture. They find out in a very real way that not everyone has his own room or parents who can read to them."

Willemssen noted the maturation that occurs in the students over the quarter.

"Initially the students feel like 'What can I do to help?' but they realize that things they contribute are helpful," she said. "It'll continue to be part of their lives after graduation."

Jimenez said the students' awareness of the complexity of the problems skyrockets.

"I think they become much more aware of how difficult it is to solve some of these difficulties," he said. "I teach a course on Mexican-American literature. Part of it deals with migrant workers. When the students meet individuals it really is an eye opener."

"They build an empathy for the individuals and then see some of the structures that make it difficult for the individuals to get out of these situations."

Both Jimenez and Willemssen believe the project augments rather than dilutes the rigor and quality of the courses.

"It enhances the academic environment because they can see it as coming to life," Willemssen said.

"By having students go out to the Eastside they are using the (Spanish) language in a far more natural setting," Jimenez added.

Santa Clara students need no prompting to articulate ways in which participation in the Eastside Project has added to their education.

"It started out being a requirement but it's turning out that I'm getting more out of it than I thought," said Lisa Lerma, a freshman from Visalia, Calif., assisting at Overfelt.

"It's taught me to respect people, to get to know what's on their mind," agreed Charpontier, the Julian Street Inn volunteer.

Piere Bossaert, a senior from Saratoga, Calif., who volunteers at Gardner, agrees.

"Saratoga is a fairly affluent area. I think it's important to get in touch with people who are less fortunate," he said. "This is my second time here. Being a role model for these kids is especially important. Eighty percent of these kids are without a father."

"As part of what I'm learning I feel a responsibility to change what's wrong," said Kari McAvoy, a junior from Portland, Ore., who also volunteers at Overfelt.

Students support the university's commitment to educate for justice.



Piere Bossaert helps Maria hit the ball at Gardner.

"At Santa Clara it's good that there are different opportunities to get an education. The goal of my education is to become a well-rounded person," McAvoy said.

"A university shouldn't be an isolated spot or a privileged world," said T.J. Frippo, a sophomore from San Francisco who is apply-

ing to the Society. He is the student representative on the project's advisory board.

"For me it's education for the whole person and the whole attitude that we are people for others," he added.

Frs. Privett and Manuel proposed the concept to the Santa Clara administration in 1984 when they were wrapping up doctoral work.

"We said that if you want us you have to buy the project," Fr. Manuel said. "The idea came out of discussions with a former education provincial, Bill Wood."

Both priests were already reputable figures at Santa Clara. Fr. Privett served a six-year stint a mile down The Alameda as principal of Bellarmine Prep. Fr. Manuel worked in campus ministry for a year after ordination before marching off to Duke University to get his doctorate in clinical psychology.

The administration agreed to their idea. In January 1986 they moved into their house in East San Jose. Fr. Germann joined them that fall, fresh from 17 years as director of campus ministry at the university.

"Dan gives a great deal of stability to the project. He's been around for a number of years and is well respected," said Fr. Beirne, academic vice president.

The success of the Eastside Project stems from a deliberate and careful process of planning and implementation. This way of proceeding garnered respect and praise for the project from each of its constituencies.

The Jesuit organizers held four brainstorming sessions--two at the university and two in the community--in the fall of 1986 at which more than 100 people helped them select a focus for the project.

"We distinguished between the curriculum and a volunteer program, a partnership rather than an outreach program," Fr. Germann said.

"We did incredible homework to get people into this," Fr. Privett said.

Administrators and faculty took note of the spadework.

"In the beginning I presume there was a kind of wondering 'Is this a nice little project that keeps certain Jesuits happy and fulfilled?'" Fr. Beirne said. Now "there are enough people who are enthusiastic about it. Many faculty members have seen the educative value for their students."

"When this thing started they spent a lot of time laying the groundwork by meeting with people," said Fr. John Privett, rector of the Jesuit community and Steve's brother.

The organizers operate according to a "needs assessment" model, asking the community what it needed.



Staff members relax in project office. From left: Fr. Dan Germann, placement coordinator

Jimenez, student assistant Gerene Del Prado, Frs. Steve Privett and Sonny Manuel.

"It's shaped by what's going on in the Eastside. It reflects the needs of the community," said Jimenez, the modern languages professor.

"The discernment process was very important in terms of overcoming the assumption that here comes another 'do-good' group that will study the poor and nothing will happen," said Catholic Charities' Purcell.

"I admire their organization. Their meetings are so well organized. It's a sign of a well-planned project. People know what they're doing," said Carmen Johnson, director of the Eastside Senior Center.

Their decision to live in East San Jose won them an enormous amount of credibility in the community.

"It says to me the institution is serious about wanting to make those ties," said Fr. Bob Moran, pastor of Most Holy Trinity, the parish in which the three Jesuits live and work.

"The perception of the community is there's really an interest in the Eastside," he added.

Other community leaders concurred with Fr. Moran's assessment.

"The decision to live with the poor was very important to communicate to the community that they were very serious about bringing the university to the people," Purcell noted.

"For them to go to the Eastside says a great deal. It's a hard world over there. It's not comfortable and it's not easy," said Gardner's

Ferrer.

Their credibility counts in the university and the Jesuit community as well.

"They're very visible people at this university. They're very competent people," Fr. Beirne said. "They figure out all sorts of ways to get students to learn."

Fr. Beirne noted that Frs. Privett and Manuel occupy tenure-track positions. Their involvement in the Eastside Project is part of their job descriptions and will play an important role in their evaluation for tenure.

"They're good academics," said Fr. Fran Smith, religious studies professor. "It's important that they be tenure track. It gives them more status as academics for the sake of their projects and for the character of the university."

"The university is saying that we think you can do this and be first-class academics."

All three priests are full members of the university's Jesuit community. Fr. Manuel is a consultant. They eat most lunches and dinners in the community dining room. They participate in the liturgical and apostolic life of the community. Their salaries go to the community.

They have been able to span the crevice between higher education and social ministry that exists in some parts of the assistance.

"The community has been very supportive, enthusiastic and curious," Fr. Steve Privett said. "That's important. We don't want to be cut off. We want to be a part of this community."

The community espouses their work.

"Within the community as a whole you don't have a body of people who regard what they're doing as something the university should not be doing," Fr. Smith said.

"I think there's a genuine positive regard for what they're doing," Fr. John Privett agreed. "It's by virtue of the people they are that they blend so well into the community."

"They've maintained very close linkages both personally and professionally with the community," Fr. Beirne agreed.

Supporters hope the project becomes more embedded in the framework of the university.

"Eventually the entire university curriculum will be involved. That's the ideal," said Jimenez.

Most of the courses presently involved with the project are in arts and sciences. The university is searching for new deans for its business and engineering schools. Supporters think these positions are crucial to the future of the project.

Fr. Beirne said these considerations will be "important" in the selection of the new deans.

"The state of readiness of this university is at a high level," he said. "But I don't think you should be telling people this is how you should be teaching your discipline."

Supporters also think the project needs to be fully incorporated into the university's budget. Currently the Bannan Foundation, a fund that supports Jesuit activities at Santa Clara, covers most of the project's expenses.

"It's not perfectly clear to me that this university has owned this project," Fr. Smith said. "It remains a question for me whether the university says this is a university project as such. When push comes to shove, who is funding the project?"

"Becoming a part of the university's budget is an important thing so it's not done on a whim, so it will become permanent," Miron-Conk said.

Organizers think the project can serve as a model.

"We see this as a model of linking up the Jesuit concern for social justice and higher education. We think it doesn't have to be an either/or situation. It can be linked," Fr. Germann said.

Fr. Beirne considers three aspects of the Eastside Project to be especially useful.

"First, to make sure there are many levels of linkage between the university and the community. (Second,) to integrate well within the university. They've involved many departments of the university. (Finally,) to have a model of active pedagogy which is very Jesuit," he said.

Project organizers are pleased with what has been accomplished yet think more needs to be done.

"We have a really good base camp but we have to move up to the next level," Fr. Steve Privett said.

Given the way they have climbed, the summit doesn't stand beyond their grasp.