Education and Social Justice Project
INTERNATIONAL SUMMER RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS 2014

IN COLLABORATION WITH THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE RESEARCH, TEACHING, AND SERVICE AT GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
About the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs

The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University, created within the Office of the President in 2006, is dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of religion, ethics, and public life. Through research, teaching, and service, the center explores global challenges of democracy and human rights; economic and social development; international diplomacy; and interreligious understanding. Two premises guide the center’s work: that a deep examination of faith and values is critical to address these challenges, and that the open engagement of religious and cultural traditions with one another can promote peace.

About the Center for Social Justice Research, Teaching, and Service

The Center for Social Justice Research, Teaching, and Service (CSJ), founded in 2001, seeks to advance justice and the common good through promoting and integrating community-based research, teaching, and service by collaborating with diverse partners and communities. CSJ works in three key areas: community and public service, curriculum and pedagogy, and research. Through such critical and engaged work, Georgetown builds on its tradition of academic excellence and contributes in singular ways to the Jesuit ideal of justice education and action “for the glory of God and the well-being of humankind.”
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This report reflects on the fifth year of the Education and Social Justice Project, which provided four Georgetown University students with fellowships to travel to Bangladesh, Brazil, Burkina Faso, and Nicaragua to conduct in-depth examinations of innovative educational initiatives, with a focus on the work of Jesuit institutions.

We are learning more every day about the deep connections between global challenges of poverty and education. Only through better access to education will the world’s poor be able to seize opportunities in an increasingly global economy. While policy analysts have documented the widespread failure of governments to meet this imperative, we still know relatively little about successful local efforts led by religious communities to advance economic and social development through education. In order to engage Georgetown undergraduates and build knowledge in this critical area, two Georgetown University centers—the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs and the Center for Social Justice Research, Teaching, and Service—created the Education and Social Justice Project in early 2010.

Under faculty guidance, Education and Social Justice fellows gather information through interviews, analyze best practices, and share their reports and conclusions with a wider global audience. The project is made possible through the generous support of Rodney Jacob (MSB’86, JD’89) and other members of the Georgetown community.

During its fifth year, the project awarded fellowships to four students who spent three weeks with institutions engaged in efforts to promote social justice through education. Kendra Layton traveled to Dhaka, Bangladesh to research how Caritas Bangladesh supports the country’s hardest-to-reach students, including those who are indigenous, live in slums, and have disabilities. In Brazil, Adam Barton partnered with Pastoral da Criança to examine its efforts to build community solidarity through maternal and early childhood health education. Elizabeth “Hopey” Fink analyzed the role of Jesuit values in supplementary education at CERCLE, a Jesuit-run study center in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Gianna Maita traveled to Nicaragua to explore student engagement within the context of Nicaraguan history and the current political atmosphere in the community of the Central American University in Managua through service-learning, research, and other programs.

During the project’s first four years, students traveled to 14 countries to conduct research: Kenya, the Philippines, Chile, India, South Africa, El Salvador, Bolivia, Uruguay, Uganda, France, Argentina, Cambodia, Peru, and Poland. Full reports and interview transcripts for all four years are available on the project website: berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/esj.

The Education and Social Justice Project is administered by Erin Shevlin of the Berkley Center. Andria Wisler of the Center for Social Justice and Katherine Marshall of the Berkley Center serve as academic advisors.
OVERVIEW

Kendra Layton, originally from Salt Lake City, Utah, is a senior in Georgetown College with a Spanish major and Education, Inquiry, and Justice and Mathematics minors. During June 2014 she spent four weeks visiting Caritas Bangladesh, founded by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Bangladesh. She interviewed the executive director and national office staff, as well as regional managers, education supervisors, and teachers in Rajshahi and Sylhet to understand their approach and work. By examining two specific projects, Notre Dame Literacy School and Aloghar (Lighthouse) Project, Kendra focused on how the organization supports the hardest to reach students such as those who are indigenous, those with disabilities, and those living in slums and rural areas, while considering sustainability and the ways employees live out their faith in their work.

PARTNER INSTITUTION: CARITAS, DHAKA, BANGLADESH

Caritas means charity or universal love, which embodies the organization’s deep, long rooted commitment to serve the people of Bangladesh. Established in 1967 as the eastern branch of Caritas Pakistan, the NGO is older than the country itself, which became independent in 1971. Caritas immediately gained trust and recognition after the cyclone of 1970 and the Liberation War of 1971 when it played an instrumental role in disaster aid relief as well as rehabilitation. Its focus has since expanded to six areas: social welfare and community development; quality education; healthcare and education; disaster management; ecological conservation and development; and development of indigenous peoples. The breadth and diversity of its projects demonstrate its holistic approach to integrated social welfare and development of the country. To take on such projects, Caritas has a national coordinating office, eight regional offices, and over 6,000 fulltime employees, making it the second largest NGO in the country.

Though Caritas originally focused on disaster management, it recognizes the important role education plays in social welfare. In its new five-year strategic plan (July 2014 to June 2019), it prioritizes easy access to education for children of disadvantaged communities and moral and ethical education. Two of Caritas’ projects directly work toward these objectives in both urban and rural contexts: Notre Dame Literacy School and Aloghar Project. The former is located in the heart of Dhaka City and supports over 1,000 students from the slums in education and health. In six rural regions of Bangladesh, Aloghar Project has over 1,005 education centers and aims to increase the literacy, empowerment, and integration of children who are indigenous, have dis-
abilities, and live in isolated areas. In both contexts, Caritas aims to support hard-to-reach students, ensure the sustainability and growth of the projects, and keep sight of the universal love embodied in their name. In total, Caritas has 11 education projects: one urban and 10 rural.

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is relatively small geographically but it comprises a wealth of historical, religious, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity from the crowded, bustling streets of Dhaka to the rice fields, mango orchards, and tea gardens of rural areas. To put the population density into context, consider over 150 million people living in an area the size of the state of Wisconsin (three times the density of neighboring India). With such growth and diversity come many opportunities but also many challenges, especially in the realm of education.

The current state of education is situated within a wider religious and historical context. Both aspects are tightly intertwined, as Bangladesh used to be a part of India then Pakistan. Ruled by the British for nearly 190 years, India and Pakistan were originally divided in 1947 to separate the Muslim and Hindu majorities. Tensions grew between East and West Pakistan, and Bengalis began agitating for greater autonomy. War erupted in 1970, which took a large toll on the country. As Father Apu Solomon Rozario, CSC, director of Notre Dame Literacy School recalls, “After liberation, our country’s condition was not good. People suffered a lot.” Akhila D’Rozario, a long-time employee of Caritas, echoes these sentiments, “The Pakistani Army killed many and 10 million Bangladeshis had fled to India as refugees.” Even though the Liberation War resulted in the birth of a new nation, between 300,000 and one million Bengalis lost their lives, many of whom were intellectuals and politicians. This devastation resulted in enduring challenges of rehabilitation and social welfare.

While Bangladesh has made large strides in rebuilding the country, it still faces significant challenges, especially poverty. Rates have dropped significantly, but 47 million people, about a third of the country’s population, were still living in poverty in 2010. The effects of poverty are present throughout Bangladesh in both rural and urban areas. During a visit to the slums with teachers from Notre Dame Literacy School in Dhaka City, residents said their rent costs anywhere from 2,400 to 4,000 taka per month, and it keeps increasing—a staggering amount for those who make less than 3,000 taka per month and must also pay for food, healthcare, and education. Those living in rural areas are affected too, and in 2010, the extreme poverty rate (those living on less than $1.25 per day) in rural areas was 21.1 percent, much larger than the 7.7 percent in urban areas. Thus, social services, including education, health, and infrastructure, are crucial to the livelihood of the population, whether they come from the government or nongovernment sector.
Poverty rates provide a glimpse into the socioeconomic situation of Bangladesh, but it is impossible to ignore how religion and faith play an instrumental role in the identity of the country. Around 90 percent of the country’s population is Muslim, followed by nine percent Hindu, with the rest being Buddhist, Christian, and other faiths. Whether it is the call to prayer five times per day, Islamist political parties, the official state religion of Islam, or the dress and social codes, faith plays a prominent role in both public and private spheres. Caritas, a Catholic organization within a Muslim country, navigates with ease this religious diversity by recognizing the rich diversity of faiths and finding commonalities among them. As Executive Director of Caritas Dr. Benedict Alo D’Rozario notes, “There is no question that all people are spiritually deep in their hearts….The aim is to reach out and to find ways to facilitate a Muslim to be a better Muslim, a Christian to be a better Christian, a Buddhist to be a better Buddhist.” Caritas does this through interreligious dialogue but also through their principle of reaching the poorest strata of the population regardless of religion.

A PANORAMA OF EDUCATION

Bangladesh has made large strides within education, especially in the realms of enrollment and gender parity. With over 16 million primary school children ages 6 through 10 and one of the largest primary education systems in the world, enrollment has increased from 60 percent in 1990 to over 90 percent in 2012. Gender parity has also largely been achieved at the primary level. Jyoti Gomes, a Caritas program coordinator, recalls, “When I was a student in school, in my class boys were the majority. Now it’s almost equal.” Recognizing its importance, the government also consistently prioritizes education within the budget allocation. From 2012 to 2013, education received 11.16 percent of the total budget, the second largest allocation after public administration. The question is whether these expenditures translate into adequate infrastructure and quality education for all students, especially when government schools only service 58 percent of students; Islamic madrasas, missionary schools, and non-formal schools account for the other 42 percent.

Many challenges still exist, including dropouts at the primary level. The completion rate of the primary five-year school cycle is a mere 50.7 percent and the average number of years to complete the cycle is 8.6. The reasons for dropout are varied, but could include children having to work to support their families, high transiency, and child marriage. Two teachers in the rural Sylhet Region, Tista Khongstia and Rebecca Dikhar, describe this phenomenon: “Sometimes it can be hard to teach because parents are not aware of the importance of education. Students drop out to become involved in their family’s work like betel leaf production.” Father Apu Solomon Rozario, CSC, of Dhaka adds, “One difficulty is that our students’ residences aren’t stable. Their parents are always moving here and there because of work. When they get a good job, they leave this place with their whole family and then the students do not come to school. Another difficulty is that some of the students, especially the girls, get married after age 8. At that time they cannot come. Although they have desire to study, they are unable because of their situation.” Thus, the Ministry of Education and others who provide educational services must continue to explore ways to ensure attendance throughout primary school and upwards to secondary and higher secondary education.

Another prominent challenge is how to reach children who live in rural areas, are disabled, are indigenous, or are living in extreme poverty in the cities. These children face challenges for varied and overlapping reasons. Historically those with disabilities and who are indigenous have been left out of mainstream schools. After the Liberation War and throughout the Bengali Language Movement, Bangladeshi leaders and the government insisted that indigenous peoples adopt the Bengali language and identity. This resulted in unrest and resistance, especially in Chittagong Hill Tracts, which sought autonomy.
and recognition of the indigenous peoples of the region. Though this recognition is improving, indigenous peoples are still left out of public discourse and face other challenges such as land ownership and displacement. Mayeda Rashid, a program officer for Caritas, explains the situation of hard-to-reach students: “Here, indigenous people are somewhat excluded from the mainstream. They don’t have the same facilities like electricity, transportation, and access to diet. It’s because they’re living in a remote place like a hill or beside a river.” Two specific Caritas projects in the field of education illustrate how Caritas is addressing these challenges.

**ORIGINS OF NOTRE DAME LITERACY SCHOOL**

One of the oldest educational programs of Caritas is Notre Dame Literacy School in Dhaka. Located in the Motijheel neighborhood, it covers five big slums including Manda, Mugda, Kamalpur, Arambagh, and Sabujbagh. Founded in 1972, its origins trace back to the Liberation War and it has continuously showed a commitment to accompanying the poorest of the poor. As Father Apu Solomon Rozario, CSC, the school’s director, explains, “At the time of liberation, American priests worked at Notre Dame College. One of them was Father Vannes and he realized he had to do something for children of the slums in terms of food and shelter. Another priest, Father Pope, realized the poor health condition of the people and started the sick shelter. They communicated with Caritas who helped them organize everything and provided financial support.” The program has continued to grow and develop, but it always remains committed to the students who, as Father Apu says, are “the heart of the school.”

**DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE STUDENTS THEY SERVE**

Notre Dame Literacy School embodies the wider mission of Caritas to support the hardest-to-reach students. In the urban context, most of them are children who live in the slums and daylaborers who haven’t yet completed their secondary education. With three shifts, Notre Dame Literacy School
serves over 1,300 students at the primary and secondary level (grades one through eight). As the school's director, Father Apu, describes it, “I notice how they are living and their condition. It’s a very dirty, unhygienic place and very congested. All family members stay in small rooms day and night.” Bela Cruze, a primary teacher at the school, concurs: “I feel so bad for them because of the way they are living. Children are suffering. They are getting sick.” Not only do these living conditions affect their health and welfare, they affect the academic outcomes of students due to lack of materials and a place to study.

Despite these challenges, a sense of duty to serve these children pervades the school. Bela Cruze asserts, “In this school we teach poor, dirty children who wouldn’t have a chance in any good school. They need dress and they need materials. But in our school, whatever they can wear, we respect [them] as a child of God, as our own child.” This belief inspires her and the other teachers to go above and beyond normal support to ensure that children find their way to the school in the first place as well as stay there. In visiting the slums one day with Bela Cruze, she told two boys about the existence of Notre Dame Literacy School. The next day, they came for the first time to gain admission. Bela’s attitude is indicative of an involved approach with the communities as well as a deep awareness and respect for where the students come from.

Many students at Notre Dame Literacy School are primary age, but some who come for the night shift are teenagers and adults who haven’t yet completed their primary and secondary education. As Father Apu explains, “Those who come for night school are day laborers. They work all day and at night they come to school. They are aware about education and they are interested in learning. Many are also adults studying with kids.” While visiting the school, there was a mother taking classes in the second grade with two children in fourth and fifth. Providing this night shift extends the opportunity to hard to reach students who would not have the chance to receive an education otherwise.

**CREATION OF AN URBAN REFUGE**

To what does Notre Dame College owe its many successes? Merely being on the school’s land demonstrates the idea of creating a refuge within the smoggy Dhaka streets. The school has a green field which is constantly occupied with students playing soccer and cricket, something not available to those living in a one-room house in the slums. The school also captures the holistic needs of students by having a doctor and health center, as well as providing a daily meal for students. Father Apu, the school’s director, describes why students never want to leave: “The students feel comfortable to stay here the whole day because they find everything here. They can play, receive food, and feel secure. They can talk to each other freely and openly. In Dhaka City, you will not find any open place. The buildings are very narrow, the rooms are very small, the air, water, and environment are polluted, but here everything is ok.”

**QUESTIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY**

Due to its commitment to serve students regardless of their socioeconomic status, Notre Dame Literacy School faces challenges including financial limitations. Its funding comes from three sources: Caritas (from Misereor, Germany), Congregation of the Holy Cross, and students of Notre Dame College, a prestigious secondary school on the same land and of the same name. The literacy school has faced difficulties because its donors have insisted that they should be self-sufficient, which contradicts Caritas’ mission to serve the hardest-to-reach. Father Apu affirms, “We do not take any money from the beneficiaries, the students and patients, because they are very poor.” This is a unique opportunity and alludes to greater challenges of education in Bangladesh: private schools, madrasas, and other non-formal schools serve 42 percent of students and some of them charge fees for attendance, food, books, and dress. For students and families living on the edge, this extra fee can be impossible.

At the same time, Notre Dame Literacy School has also developed a unique partnership with Notre Dame College (NDC), the higher secondary school on the same land and of the same name. NDC usually charges a fee for attendance, but every January, NDC selects students to come from the rural parts of Bangladesh who teach at the literacy school for a year. In exchange for their work, the college pays their tuition fees, residential fees, and supports them with food and other educational materials. Thus, higher secondary students
gain valuable teaching experience while also advancing their own education. Xavier Gomes, the literacy school’s manager, describes this partnership: “It’s not only a relation, but a philosophy of Notre Dame College. Many rich students come to NDC, but NDC believes they’re not only for the rich people but also for the poor people.” The partnership with NDC students supports the sustainability of the school and allows them to continue to serve the poorest of the poor.

ORIGINS AND MISSION OF ALOGHAR PROJECT

Notre Dame Literacy School is an example of Caritas’ work in the urban environment, but Caritas also recognizes the need to serve those in rural contexts with very few government resources. As mentioned earlier, extreme poverty more drastically affects rural areas. Roads and infrastructure are relatively undeveloped, which impedes the progress of building schools. Mayeda Rashid, program officer of Aloghar Project, provides context for the lack of formal government schools in rural areas: “If you work to build a formal school, it will take a long time. To start a formal school, you need lots of children from playgroup to class five. It would require many teachers and lots of support. In the places we work, there are not so many students that we need to build a formal school. If we consider the economics, it would not be feasible to build a government school.” The areas which Caritas targets might only be accessible by a dirt road, a river crossing, or by traveling geographically isolated terrain.

As a result of that need, Caritas began the Aloghar Project in November 2011 under a project called “Supporting the Hardest to Reach through Basic Education.” They negotiated with the European Union to receive 10 million euros over six years. Aiming to increase the literacy, empowerment, and integration of the hardest to reach students, Aloghar includes 1,005 education centers in six regions of Bangladesh at the primary level. According to Caritas’ 2012-2013 Annual Report, a total of 60,711 students have the opportunity to receive a basic education through this project. Around 43 percent are from ethnic communities and two percent have special needs.

LOGISTICS OF THE PROJECT

Based on the project’s setup, communities must demonstrate an investment in the educational centers from the very beginning because they are responsible for providing the school building. Once this is acquired, Caritas will fund teachers’ salaries and classroom materials. Though the central team of Aloghar is based in Dhaka, most of the work occurs in the area offices in six regions of the country: Chittagong, Dinajpur, Khulna, Mymensingh, Rajshahi, and Sylhet. In each area, a coordinator and education supervisors manage the implementation of the project as well as provide sustained feedback to the teachers. Aminul Islam, an area coordinator in Rajshahi, describes his position as such: “Under my area office I oversee 30 educational centers. I frequently visit them and maintain contact with the education supervisors to provide feedback to the teachers. I network with government officials and non-government officials and facilitate implementation of all the activities of this project.” Most importantly, the teachers come from the communities themselves, not only because they know the indigenous language and population, but because it is more financially feasible for the project.

Caritas recognizes the importance of ensuring quality education for all students, which includes a balanced student to teacher ratio and employing an inviting teaching pedagogy. First, Caritas aims to ensure there are no more than thirty students per teacher, though the number of classrooms, teachers, shifts, and total students may vary. Aloghar provides education from preschool through the fifth grade, so all the schools employ a multi-grade approach. In visiting the Kuchaibari Educational Center in Rajshahi, the teacher had first year students practicing their letters at their desks, second years doing math on the rug, and third years working with her at the blackboard. This differs drastically from a school in Dhaka City where the student to teacher ratio was 95 to one.

The other way in which Caritas aims to reach students is through an inviting teaching pedagogy and a more informal environment. Many of the students are not used to a very formal setup, but Aloghar educational centers feel closer to home. Tista Khongstia and Rebecca Dikhar, teachers at Lama Punjee Education Center located at the extreme border of Sylhet, describe, “Before Aloghar, we taught by traditional
methods. Aloghar started teaching through playing. Doing so motivates children through innovative projects. The center is very engaging for them which makes them want to come to school.” Creating an inviting, open space is of utmost importance when students could drop-out or become involved in their family’s work such as betel leaf production or rice cultivation. Just as Notre Dame College has become a refuge for students in the urban context, the educational centers have become open, inviting places for students in rural villages.

REACHING INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

From the outside, Bangladesh may appear relatively ethnically and linguistically homogenous. However, this is far from the truth. Bangladesh has over 45 indigenous groups and languages including Khasia, Santal, Urao, Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Mro, Manipuri, and Garo, which make up around two percent of the population. Historically the Bengali Language Movement was a large component of the Liberation War, which called for the recognition of Bengali as an official language of the government, education, and media, as opposed to Pakistani Urdu. Thus, many indigenous languages were undermined for the greater Bengali majority, which still excludes them from the political and educational discourse of present day. Dipok Ekka, Caritas regional manager of Rajshahi region, describes how indigenous peoples are also caught up in a wider network of forces, “In our context of Bangladesh today, indigenous people are landless. Other people see them as backward. Their literacy rate is very poor. Some lose their land to landlords or the rest of the majority community. Because of that they’re not able to maintain a good standard of life.” An important aspect of Aloghar is to create opportunities for indigenous peoples in the school environment.

Caritas promotes linguistic diversity and affirmation of mother tongues by employing bilingual teachers in the classroom who are from those communities. Four educational centers in Rajshahi and two in Sylhet provide examples of this strategy. Rajshahi is the land of mangoes and rice fields, located in the western-most part of the country. At the Kuchaibari Educational Center, of approximately 65 students, half of them are Santal. At the Zinarpur Educational Center, located relatively close to the first educational center, most of the students are Urao. In both of the centers, the teachers seamlessly move back and forth between the languages, ensuring that students receive education in their mother tongue while simultaneously learning Bengali. Teachers at the Lamapunjee Educational Center in Sylhet Region of the Northeast and close to tea plantations, describe the intricate relation between language and culture, “The most important thing is to keep alive the Khasi culture. If we don’t practice it, it will disappear. That’s why it’s very important to study the Khasi language.” Caritas plays a role in the valorization and revitalization of indigenous languages,
which supports the hardest to reach students.

Another way in which Caritas supports indigenous students is by developing multi-lingual education materials in eight indigenous languages for pre-primary and primary level education. At the launching ceremony in February 2014, Executive Director Benedict Alo D’Rozario said, “education is a right and education in mother tongue is also a right. We are committed to promote and protect these rights side by side with the government.” This is a great step in the education of the country as the Ministry of Education had not previously created multi-lingual materials.

REACHING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Similar to indigenous students, those living with disabilities have also been historically excluded from the school and public spheres. As Sister Nirmola Cruze, CSC, the in-charge of the Asha Griha School in Dhaka for students with disabilities says, “Before, when women had children with disabilities, the society would say, ‘This is the mother’s sin. Because the mother did a sinful thing, that’s why the child was born like this.’” As such, little attention was spent on providing resources and infrastructure to meet their needs. Through their educational projects, especially Aloghar, Caritas aims to reach these students.

Three main ways in which Caritas aims to reach students with disabilities are teacher training, inclusive classrooms, and stipends for students. First, Aloghar provides training on inclusive education about how to support students with disabilities in the classroom. Secondly, Aloghar gives stipends to students to support their success in an inclusive classroom so they are not separated from their peers. As Dipok Ekka, Rajshahi regional manager, says, “We provide the students devices like artificial limbs or glasses. We give stipends to those with extreme disabilities to go to a more specialized center to ensure their education and food. We are proud that the students
with special needs who can function in our centers stay there.” Looking toward the future, Executive Director Benedict Alo D’Rozario recognizes the great strides that have been made in the areas of inclusive education, but wants to look for a public-private partnership and ensure quality education throughout the primary level for students with disabilities.

QUESTIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY

One of the largest challenges facing Aloghar and many Caritas projects is their sustainability. As stipulated in its founding, Aloghar began on November 27, 2011 and will come to an end on November 26, 2017, benefitting from a grant of 10 million euros from the European Union and other support from Secours Catholique-Caritas France over six years. What will happen to the educational centers after these six years? Mayeda Rashid, program officer of Aloghar, asserts, “Six years is not enough. We talk about sustainable education. I don’t think six years is enough to get a project and leave it to the communities to continue. At least fifteen years is required because the areas in which we work aren’t equipped. If we want to make it sustainable and leave it to the community, we need to make leaders. Gradually we’ll leave, but not all of a sudden after several years.”

Some of the possibilities include initiating a new phase of the project, allowing the government to manage the schools, or empowering the communities to take ownership over them. There is a history of creating new phases, such as the Underprivileged Children Preparatory Education Project (UCPEP), which completed its fourth phase in 2010. There is also a precedent of the government beginning to manage the schools. As Shikha Rani Halsona, Program Office of UCPEP, signals, “I don’t have the statistics, but some UCPEP schools will have government administration beginning in July and will receive government facilities. We believe this is our achievement. The government doesn’t feel pressure, rather they support us.” As Halsona’s comment demonstrates, Caritas has become a catalyst in inspiring the government to provide more facilities in rural areas and continue to push for greater educational opportunities.

One of the most exciting aspects of the project is seeing the communities also begin to take ownership over the educational centers, though how to represent this reality in the budget allocation remains a challenge. Executive Director Benedict Alo D’Rozario notes that in the Mymensingh Region at least 17 schools now have three teachers instead of the designated two. The communities have arranged to pay an additional teacher because they believe it will be more effective for their students. Dr. Alo goes on to describe how, in Chittagong Hill Tracts, it is difficult for teachers to commute to schools because of the hilly geography. In response, the villagers have given the teachers a place to stay during the week so they do not need to commute back and forth. While some view this as challenging, Dr. Alo concludes, “I am hopeful. Other people see their ownership as a problem. I see it as an opportunity.”

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Just as Caritas’ name of universal love is important, Aloghar’s name (Lighthouse) speaks to its wider mission. It is Caritas’ hope that it will continue to provide education to hard to reach students and contribute to the social welfare and development of the country. As Mayeda Rashid says, “Alo means light and ghar means house. We’re like light bearers. We provide the light of education where there is darkness.” Dipok Ekka, Rajshahi regional manager, agrees, “Aloghar is playing a good role for the context of our country. We need this type of educational center in other areas. We’ve already seen that government officials and NGOs are trying their best to implement this type of center. I believe Aloghar will be a pioneer for others to follow.”

CONCLUSION

Although the education system of Bangladesh faces many challenges, Caritas has humbly and strategically inserted itself within the landscape to support the hardest to reach students. Both Notre Dame Literacy School and Aloghar (Lighthouse) Project embody Caritas’ vision in the context of Catholic social teaching, which envisions a society with equal respect for all. Catholic social teaching also informs Caritas’ holistic approach of a preferential option for the poor, an emphasis on the life and dignity of the human person, and a commitment to love and justice. As Mayeda Rashid affirms, “It’s not easy to fetch students and say, ‘Come here and be educated.’ It’s better if we go to them and create the opportunity so they can learn.” These projects do so in both the urban and rural environments by creating a refuge from the struggles of poverty and challenges of daily life. Looking forward, Caritas recognizes there is still much to be done with more involvement in the slums, greater emphasis on quality education, and an expansion of secondary education and teachers training programs. In the meantime, its projects contribute to their wider goal of a more just and peaceful Bangladesh. In reflecting on the relationship between the two, Caritas Executive Director Dr. Alo states it clearly: “It’s both ways: education is helping the oppressed and the oppressor to become better humans. That’s the question of dignity. When there is dignity, there are rights. Without respect for dignity you cannot respect rights. If there are no rights, there is no justice. If there are dignity, rights, and justice, peace will prevail in society. That’s what we all want: peace for society.”
INTerview Excerpts

XAvier gOmes, manager of notre Dame literacy sChool

As this is a mission school, what are the advantages of being outside of the formal government education system?

I’m speaking not only as a manager, but as a citizen of Bangladesh. There are various kinds of education centers: government, full government, half government, and madrasas. Only the schools that are maintained by missionaries try strongly with their heart and soul to ensure that all of the students who come receive an education. At our school we try to give students education for their lives. On the other hand, when a group of people maintain an educational center with a business or financial mindset, they only try to earn money. Anywhere in Bangladesh you can see the difference between private schools and mission schools. All of our students come from slum areas, and slum people by birth are different from the rest. When they come to us and to our school, within a short time, they become changed as human beings. Notre Dame gives the highest level of education, and they take from the students just a little bit. Here, I get a small amount of money, but I could not leave this place.

BelA cRUZe, teaCher at notre Dame literacy sChool

Take me back to the moment when you saw Mother Teresa. How does that experience continue to affect you?

I saw Mother Teresa with my own eyes. She was picking up unwanted babies from the dustbins during wartime. She cleaned, fed, and took care of the children. They grew big and went to school, like our students here. Mother did many things for poor people, for India. She said, “India is my own country. I am an Indian.” She served the poorest of the poor. For the rich people, there is someone there. Middle class people also, there is help. But these kinds of people, there is nobody, unwanted people. I feel for them, and I understand them because my husband is jobless. I am earning alone. One-third of what I earn I have to give for house-rent. I only earn 3000 Taka, which is for eating, traveling, education (my daughter is attending university), so I am in an awful condition. I feel how they are in condition because mine is the same. That’s why I feel very bad for them. Life is very difficult.

Mayeda rashid, aloghar program OFFicer

Aloghar is predominantly in rural areas of Bangladesh. What are most of the communities like?

Most of the children are indigenous people. Not that they’re not normal Bangladeshi children. But here, indigenous people are somewhat excluded from the mainstream. They don’t have the same facilities like electricity, transportation, and access to diet. It’s because they’re living in a remote place like a hill or beside a river. It’s not easy to fetch them and say, “Come here and be educated.” It’s better if we go to them and create the opportunity so they can learn in their own community.

Jyoti gOmes, Caritas livelihood promotion project

What is the relationship like between Caritas and the government?

It’s a big question, but in a nutshell I can say, in the context of Bangladesh, Caritas has a very good reputation at the government level because of our transparency, communication, and openness. This exists at all levels: local, regional, and national. Before starting any program, we disseminate the message to the local government authorities. We organize a meeting and dialogue with the government and other stakeholders. We clearly inform who we are and what we intend to do for whom and we speak about the allocation of budgets. Even at the level of planning, we involve people.

Dr. BenedicT aLO d’rozario, exeCutive direCtor of Caritas Bangladesh

In the area of education, what are the areas where Caritas has excelled and areas where can it still grow?

We have done well in the areas of pre-primary and primary education, especially for the hard to reach children of indigenous communities of coastal and hilly areas. We have also done very well in technical education. There are still gaps. We don’t have much involvement in cities, urban areas, or the slums. There are only one or two projects that address these needs. We have also been engaged and involved in inclusive education with
children with disabilities. Though we have made great strides, they should be given priority in existing schools. In order to do that, we will look for a public-private partnership. Our emphasis will be to include everyone and have quality education through the primary level. Then we will address the secondary level and even teachers training. For quality education, you need good teachers. We will be doing advocacy with the government for more resources and multi-lingual education. We have developed material for eight indigenous languages, but there's more to be done and to replicate.

**How do you view the connection between education and social justice?**

I always say education leads to justice. If you are an oppressor and better educated, then you have a tendency to lean toward justice. You realize your responsibility as a human being and you will do more just things. If you are an oppressor, you are aware of your rights and your strength. You are united and you can fight for just behavior, attitude, and you can protest. You can refuse what is unjust. Education gives you the strength.

It's both ways, education is helping the oppressed and the oppressor to become better humans. That's the question of dignity. When there is dignity, there are rights. Without respect for dignity you cannot respect rights. If there are no rights, there is no justice. If there are dignity, rights, and justice, peace will prevail in society. That's what we all want: peace for society.

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BRAZIL: PASTORAL DA CRIANÇA
ADAM BARTON (C’16)

OVERVIEW

Adam Barton is a junior in Georgetown College majoring in Spanish and Portuguese Studies with a minor in Education, Inquiry, and Justice. Originally from Rockville, Maryland, Adam spent the summer after his freshman year teaching English in southeastern Brazil. In June 2014, he returned to Brazil to conduct research on best practices in community health education through a partnership with the Opus Prize-winning international maternal and early childhood health organization, Pastoral da Criança. Beginning his research at Pastoral’s national headquarters in Curitiba, Adam interviewed key stakeholders in the Pastoral network, ranging from program leaders to families receiving health education services. Adam then traveled to the Recife, Pernambuco area in the Northeast to investigate the realities of service implementation and program differentiation on the ground. His research focused on Pastoral programming at the intersection of faith, education, and social justice, examining more specifically the role of building community solidarity through sustainable, faith-inspired actions.

PARTNER INSTITUTION: PASTORAL DA CRIANÇA

A social action organization connected to the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB), Pastoral da Criança takes its philosophy from the biblical verse “I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Its core mission is to defend this idea of life in abundance through the promotion of the full and complete development of all children from the womb to six years of age. “Roughly translated as the “child’s ministry,” the Pastoral name reflects a type of Brazilian religious institution that seeks to continue the mission of Jesus Christ on earth through the defense of those who suffer poverty and exclusion, and does so through simple and sustainable community-based actions rooted in the spirit of ecumenicalism.

Pastoral traces its roots back to a 1982 United Nations conference in Geneva, Switzerland at which UNICEF Executive Director James Grant approached the archbishop of São Paulo, Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns, with an idea that would revolutionize the field of community health in Brazil: leveraging the reach of the Catholic Church as a tool to reduce the staggering childhood mortality rates plaguing the nation. Upon his return to Brazil, Bishop Arns reached out to his sister, pediatrician and public health leader Dr. Zilda Arns Neumann. She embraced the idea. She had seen firsthand the devastation caused by malnutrition and diarrhea-induced dehydration during her tenure in the National Department of Health, and recognized the urgent need for community...
health education services that could reduce these easily preventable deaths.

With this vision in mind, Dr. Arns Neumann contacted Cardinal Geraldo Majella Agnelo, archbishop of Londrina and a Florestópolis native, through the CNBBB network. Together, they decided to test the model of community-based health education in the southern city of Florestópolis which, at the time, had the highest infant mortality rate in the state of Paraná. For every thousand live births, 127 infants were expected to die, with the majority of these deaths occurring due to preventable causes. Working on the belief that the community could organize itself to combat this trend, Dr. Arns Neumann trained the first group of Pastoral leaders in the five themes that would form the base for all of Pastoral’s future actions: maternal healthcare, breastfeeding, nutritional monitoring, vaccinations, and oral rehydration techniques. The results were stunning; after just one year of Pastoral activity in the city, child mortality rates in Florestópolis fell to only 28 deaths per thousand live births—a reduction of over 450 percent.

At the request of CNBB Secretary General Luciano Mendes de Almeida, Dr. Arns Neumann presented the results of her efforts at the 1984 National Conference of Bishops. The report was met with great enthusiasm. The bishops in attendance recognized that neither the severity nor the preventability of this child mortality epidemic were limited to southern Brazil, and thus called on Dr. Arns Neumann to bring her dynamic methodology centered on community participation to other Brazilian states. Up to this point, Pastoral had subsisted on modest funding provided by UNICEF, so when the federal government took interest in its cause and pledged a secondary line of funding, large-scale expansion efforts could begin in earnest.

By 1992, Pastoral had managed to reach every Brazilian state, and began to turn its attention outward. Seeing the similar issues of highly preventable infant mortality faced by its Latin American neighbors, Pastoral da Criança partnered once again with UNICEF in its first international expansion effort to bring Dr. Arns Neumann’s brand of participatory health education to Paraguay in 1996. It was Dr. Arns Neumann’s receipt of the million-dollar Opus Prize in 2006, however, that truly paved the way for breaking ground on the international stage; over the next eight years, Pastoral would come to serve children and families in 21 nations across four continents.

Tragically, during a humanitarian mission to Port au Prince, Haiti in January 2010, Dr. Arns Neumann fell victim to the historic earthquake that devastated the nation just as she was finishing a discourse on the power of community health education. Her son, Dr. Nelson Arns Neumann, succeeded her as the international coordinator for Pastoral da Criança. Today, under the leadership of National Coordinator Sister Vera Lúcia Altoé, Pastoral directly serves over one million families across 3,821 Brazilian municipalities through the combined action of nearly 200,000 volunteers.

INTRODUCTION

This report explores the relationship between Pastoral’s mission of promoting life in abundance through education founded in faith and the realities of program implementation in a diverse republic, addressing the following question: what practices have led Pastoral da Criança to achieve such remarkable success in the area of community health education?

The report’s first section provides a brief overview of the Brazilian healthcare system, setting the stage for an investigation of the Pastoral paradigm in a national context. Next, Pastoral’s model is reviewed in more detail to identify the key underpinnings of successful community health education practices. Finally, contemporary Pastoral is examined in light of elements that distinguish it from other health education forces in Brazil, with particular attention to the role of building community solidarity in the fight to effect systemic change.

HEALTHCARE IN THE REPUBLIC

Cleide Maria Vieira is a 32-year-old mother of four living in an urban community that sits on the western edge of Recife, Pernambuco. Upon entering the house that Ms. Vieira shares with her parents, brother, and nephews, one is met by the delectable aroma of brigadeiro and pão de queijo that wafts in from the outdoor kitchen, and is greeted by the smiling faces of four happy and healthy children. All of the children have been followed by Pastoral workers since the organization entered the community ten years ago. A baker by trade, Ms. Vieira lives in a small home abutted by an open sewer line in a portion of the neighborhood that has undergone considerable change over the past few years, shifting from the epitome of Brazilian favela life to a community with increasing social supports and economic opportunities developing alongside the urban metropolis of Recife.

So when, in late June, her mother fell to the floor clutching her chest, Ms. Vieira immediately took her to the small hospital serving her community. In spite of her serious condition, however, Ms. Vieira’s mother was turned away at the door; “if she is not dead,” the nurse told her, “we are not going to see her. Go take her to the clinic and get in line.” This alarming lack of emergency medical care is compounded by the dearth of qualified healthcare practitioners in medical clinics that attend to the general needs of urban poor and rural communities in
Pernambuco. “Every part of the system is failing us,” said Ms. Vieira. “The pharmacy is missing medication, it is impossible to make appointments in the clinics because there are no secretaries to answer your calls, and physicians come here and leave running after less than 15 days.” Ms. Vieira has been on the waiting list for a general checkup since early in 2012 and worries that, given that this trend is in no way unique to her, it could create a severe patient backlog for those in her community with the most need, leaving, for example, expectant mothers to be denied the prenatal care that they need. “Here,” she said, articulating the medical neglect felt by her community, “we are a forgotten people.”

Official statistics suggest that Brazil boasts a physician-to-population ratio that is high relative to many of its Latin American neighbors, and indeed higher than many other developing nations.xvii How does one account for this discrepancy? Despite decades of reforms aimed at increasing local health service accessibility, Brazil experiences growing healthcare inequalities along geographic and socioeconomic lines that, coupled with an increasing trend toward urbanization have left massive gaps in its public healthcare system. Large portions of the population must choose to either seek private healthcare or face exorbitant wait times for costly surgeries or examinations. With 22 of the 26 Brazilian states suffering from physician-to-population ratios that are significantly below the national average, and five classified as states in “severe shortage” by definition of the World Health Organization, it is clear that trained physicians are indeed in short supply throughout the republic.xviii The national healthcare system, straining under an increasing patient load in hospitals located in rural and poor communities, has tended to shift funding away from primary care providers, thus creating what Institute of Applied Public Health Law President, Dr. Nelson Rodrigues dos Santos, labeled a “vicious circle” that results in further augmentation of national emergency care costs.

The Rise of Privatization

To forget Ms. Vieira’s second option, however, would be remiss. Written into the 1988 Brazilian Federal Constitution was comprehensive health sector reform, which was tightly linked to the call for state responsibility over what were considered to be the fundamental rights of a citizen. In practice, this philosophy resulted in a public healthcare system that was politically and administratively decentralized to the municipalities and functionally integrated across all levels of care. Named the Unified Health System (SUS), this system promised access to preventative, emergency, and specialized care for all Brazilian nationals without premium, while at the same time allowing for community participation by empowering local governments in the decision-making process.

Despite—or perhaps because of—these reform efforts, a strong, privatized healthcare sub-system developed in tandem with SUS, the power of which can be traced back to the Brazilian state’s historical support of the private sector. Notwithstanding their apparent independence, however, these two systems emerged to be quite complementary, with the public sector relying on private contracts to provide the majority of medical care and diagnostic services offered to patients.xix This dependence, though, leads to systemic tension and vulnerability where finances are concerned, as the public sub-sector suffers continual underfunding alongside the subsidies and contracts offered to the private sub-sector.xx

It is in the face of strong constitutional guarantees of basic citizens’ rights, then, that socioeconomic inequities around access and care continue to exist. The practical choice that Brazilian citizens face also reflects and accentuates sharp socioeconomic divides; private health plans, regulated by federal mandate beginning in 2000, provide only about one quarter of Brazilians with reliable access to quality medical care. The unfortunate reality is that the private healthcare market is concentrated in the same, wealthy regions that already have consistent access to public health services—namely the South and Southeast. Thus millions of Brazil’s most vulnerable are left un- or under-covered due to distribution inequity.

Preventative Medicine for the People

Diverging from international healthcare trends, general practitioners have historically played a relatively minor role in the Brazilian healthcare system; Brazil focused on emergency and specialized care due to funding limitations imposed by
pre-SUS healthcare laws, and accordingly developed a reliance on hospitals rather than clinics. In practice, this equates to a primary care system that, according to retired professor of public health Dr. Rodrigues dos Santos, is empowered to resolve or diagnose early 20 percent of all disease at most, leaving the remaining 80 percent in need of specialist or emergency treatment that municipalities are simply unable to afford. By shifting costs to accommodate this need and avoid the punitive legal measures that result from the failure to meet emergency care demand, primary care is left in an increasingly precarious position, further weakening its ability to prevent disease.

Modern efforts to revamp the system of care, however, have placed a higher priority on the role of primary care, taking as a model Pastoral da Criança’s community-based methodology. “Having seen [Pastoral’s] enormous success in the community,” explained Clovis Boufleur, manager of institutional relations for Pastoral da Criança, politicians “knew that the best way of improving health outcomes [was] to train individuals to enter family homes to talk to about health.” This realization was an important factor in shaping Brazil’s education-focused Family Health Program. Mandating the training of community health education teams inspired by the Pastoral paradigm, the Family Health Program has become a mainstay of the Brazilian push for universal access to primary healthcare, which brings together professional knowledge with community-centered delivery streams. In fact, it was with the support of Dr. Arns Neumann and her Leader’s Guide that the first team of Community Health Agents was trained, and the compilation of subsequent training materials also involved expertise from the Pastoral team.

But this shifting focus toward primary healthcare is not occurring fast enough; in the eyes of Dr. Rodrigues dos Santos, retired professor of public health at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas, the Brazilian medical system represents a “massive and saddening inversion of healthcare goals” in which healthcare spending continues to favor specialized and emergency medicine techniques to combat advanced disease.
and provides late diagnoses that are uneconomical to the point of requiring wait times exceeding one year for consultations. This stands in stark contrast to well-functioning primary healthcare systems that manage to avoid or resolve early between 80 and 90 percent of all diseases through inexpensive and low-tech primary care procedures.

Returning once more to the case of Ms. Vieira, it should be noted that her mother had apparently been suffering from chronic and undiagnosed hypertension that, if caught early by a general practitioner in a standard checkup, could have been proactively treated in ways that would have avoided the myocardial infarction that nearly claimed her life. The power of primary care is significant. It is here where Pastoral excels—providing access to life-saving, preventative health education services that do not use medical professionals, but rather simple, dedicated community workers who know the needs of the families that they serve. More than simply a system of community health educators, however, Pastoral represents a network of fierce primary healthcare advocates that is 200,000 members strong in the fight for the basic right to life afforded to all peoples through both scripture and constitution.

THE PASTORAL MODEL

Since its inception in 1983, Pastoral has stood as a constant force in the face of a changing healthcare landscape. Even as Pastoral moved to adapt to evolving community needs, the underpinnings of the Pastoral model have remained largely unchanged; founded in a mission to defend the rights of children, it unites life and faith through the delivery of basic information and simple services that have a large impact while fostering a community of love, trust, and respect—empowering community members to become agents of their own transformation. This mission is carried out through the delivery of three basic actions—the home visit, the celebration of life event, and the reflection and evaluation meeting—executed by teams of trained community members. Trained in community health education techniques through the use of a training manual entitled the Leader’s Guide, these Pastoral volunteers are called leaders, and are supervised hierarchically by an elected regional coordinator who acts as part of a five-tiered responsibility structure.

Organizational Structure

Given the critical role of the Catholic Church in Pastoral da Criança’s establishment, it is not surprising that the Church remains the organizational foundation for Pastoral actions to this day. Following the hierarchy of the Church, Pastoral leadership begins at the national level and flows down through the state, diocese, parish, and community levels. In Pastoral terminology, “sector” generally replaces the term “diocese,” and “branch” is often used in lieu of “parish.” Recruited and trained at the community level, each leader is assigned to follow no more than twelve children and pregnant mothers, and is directly supervised by a branch coordinator who organizes and leads all community efforts—from family and leader recruitment to monthly reflection meetings. This supervision continues up the chain of command in an accountability system that provides increasing responsibility over community outcomes to coordinators at each level. Democratically elected through a biennial community assembly in which the local bishop has the final say, coordinators at each level of the Pastoral command are allowed to serve between four and eight years total in their post before being trained into another role, allowing the promotion of new talent while ensuring programmatic sustainability.

Institutionally, Pastoral’s focus has always been on the leader as the central figure in serving the community; as Pastoral da Criança International Coordinator Dr. Nelson Arns Neumann observed: “Dr. Zilda always focused on the role of the volunteer—that he or she really wanted to work with the families and not deal with bureaucratic issues.” For this reason, administrative processes were intentionally concentrated at the national headquarters, service work was decentralized to the many hands of community volunteers, and development and training initiatives were always focused on those actors whose feet were on the ground each and every day—the leaders. This management structure, which promotes community-level leaders as the fundamental building block for Pastoral actions, allows for an infusion of a dynamic quality into those activities on the ground, widening and narrowing scope in accordance with local realities and thus augmenting programmatic efficacy. Pernambuco State Coordinator Agenaldo Leão perhaps best
Simple Actions

Following the Pastoral ideal that simple, concentrated actions can produce large-scale community transformations, a triad of monthly community-centered activities comprises the foundation of leader efforts. The first of these actions, the home visit, lays the foundation for the other two, and revolves around the intimate interaction between leaders and the families that they follow. Taking the form of an informal conversation between friends, these home visits serve as a vehicle through which Pastoral collects data metrics on their families; while in the home, leaders ask a series of questions linked to health indicators—for example: Has your child had diarrhea this month? Has your child been taken to the clinic this month, and has he or she been attended to? Has the expectant mother received her tetanus vaccine?—in an effort to track early childhood and gestational health and development. Recorded in a leader journal that also includes key warning signs to which the leader must be attentive during the home visit, this information is compiled and analyzed by the main office each month to provide a community health profile that is used to track community development. More than simply taking notes, however, this monthly meeting is a time for the sharing of knowledge relevant to the family’s needs. Leaders, following a standardized timeline outlined in their Leader’s Guide, pass out a series of “bonds of love” cards to expectant mothers, which relate information on fetal development, signs of danger for pregnant women and young children, and appropriate pre-natal care. Postpartum education involves direct instruction on topics such as citizen healthcare rights, child development and learning, warning signs for emerging health risks, immunization needs, oral health, disease prevention, and healthy nutrition.

In the final monthly action—the reflection and evaluation meeting—the leaders of a Pastoral Branch come together with their coordinator to discuss community issues, receive continuing education, and plan for the future. It is a chance for each leader to share their concerns with their peers and to celebrate those community health achievements that have been made over the past month. Through analysis of community evolution using Pastoral’s online tracking system, discussion of specific community problems is encouraged as leaders unite to tackle those issues facing the families that they serve through advocacy and empowerment. These meetings also serve as the stage during which leaders compile information from their individual leader journals into a branch “FABS”—the tracking sheet and monthly evaluation of basic community health and education actions—that are mailed monthly to the national headquarters in Curitiba, Paraná to be digitized into health indicators for the Pastoral community tracking system.

Through these community actions, Pastoral is constructed in the community imagination as an invaluable resource that is both legitimate and accessible—a trusted partner that, in the words of Pastoral mother Clide Vieira, offers “not just services,” but rather a “structure and support…that bring[s] comfort and experience” to the lives of the families that it serves. These activities are directly informed by a rigorous information and tracking system that allows leaders to benefit from a macro-level view of issues compiled on the ground, creating a community safety net that quantifies progress to motivate leaders and their families while monitoring change to ensure that no community is allowed to fail.
Pastoral da Criança emphasizes turning theory into practice and thus its educational methodology provides for participatory and dynamic training that serves to engage learners through thoughtful inquiry and meaningful conversation. Capped at a maximum of 15 trainees, Pastoral’s training sequence for new leaders spans 15 unique sections that each take an average of three-and-a-half hours to complete, and is structured by the 300-page *Leader’s Guide* that contains information ranging from physiology and biological development to children’s rights and how to promote peace in the family. Because of the small class size, these sessions are unique in their ability to provide trainees with an intimate and interactive experience in which they are able to engage with their trainer and learn from one another as they share their own knowledge. Dr. Thereza Baptista, who directs leader and trainer preparation efforts from Pastoral’s national office, is quick to emphasize that, in addition to necessary content knowledge, trainers are “heavily instructed in teaching methodologies surrounding dialogue facilitation, learning objectives, and spiritual practices” vital to the complete development of future leaders.

The training is, at its core, rooted in five foundational actions: seeing, judging, acting, evaluating, and celebrating. Pastoral National Coordinator Sister Vera Lucia Altoé explains: “First, we seek to know the reality of the community; then we analyze the causes of that situation; then we seek to act to transform that reality; then we evaluate the new situation, the persisting needs as well as the errors that we may have made along the way; finally, we celebrate our victories...as well as the union of the community around the healthy development of their children.”

The skills learned during leader training are guided at once on the levels of theory and practice—on classroom learning and hands-on experience. When, for example, leaders are learning about the biology of pregnancy, they receive homework requiring them to go and visit an expectant mother to “[put]
into practice that which they have learned in training.” “It is a methodology,” states Sister Altoé, “that serves to keep us moving, to keep us engaged.”

This intensive methodology, which encourages the development of individual leadership, plays a direct role on both public perceptions of leaders and community impact. “Our leaders,” observes Manager of Projects and International Partnerships Rubia Pappini, “are respected in the community because they are highly trained […] and this personal development leads to personal transformation that in turn allows our leaders to transform their own communities.” Further, this training methodology necessarily spills over into the participatory, learner-centric instruction provided by Pastoral leaders. Because Pastoral provides no one-size-fits-all method for educating families, leaders are prepared through a diversified and hands-on training to empathize at the individual level and recognize the unique assets and needs of each family. A Pastoral leader does not simply pass along prepackaged educational materials, nor does he or she provide a lecture on warning signs for newborn health; rather, a leader approaches each and every family interaction from the perspective of a friend and partner, asking questions and developing a bond of trust that allows a family to pose their own questions, in turn.

**A MISSION OF SOLIDARITY, A MISSION OF FAITH**

In 30 short years, Pastoral da Criança has managed to develop and then replicate successfully a model of grassroots community organizing that reaches all corners of the world’s fifth largest nation. The program has reduced exponentially childhood and maternal mortality rates by promoting simple, community-based health actions. With a vast network of volunteers recruited for the community, from the community, Pastoral illustrates what can be accomplished when a population moves in unity. A central question arises that is key to programmatic reproducibility: what elements of the Pastoral model have made this success possible? When interviewees from both within the Pastoral system and without were posed this exact question, three responses emerged: the preferential option for the poor, deep faith values, and the commitment to building community solidarity.

**The Preferential Option**

Rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ in the Catholic tradition, the preferential option for the poor is a key tenet of the Catholic imagination, holding that it is the Christian’s duty to seek out ways to empower and stand in solidarity with the poor and powerless. A belief central to the system of Pastoral values, the idea that God reveals himself with preference for the poor and dejected serves to inform its mission of coming to the defense of the defenseless—the poor, the young, and the sick. As National Coordinator Sister Altoé reminded us, the “work of Pastoral da Criança is truly the work of Jesus; it is going to where the smallest and the poorest, the most fragile and the abandoned are, and walking with them” in solidarity. This sentiment is echoed by Recife Sector Coordinator Arlete Mendes, who holds that the mission of Pastoral is to reflect the preferential option by “[raising] up those who have fallen”—by acting in service to those who are in most need, and looking upon them with the “eyes of Jesus and the smile of Mary.”

In light of a developing economy and emerging social opportunities across the nation, however, many interviewees cast doubt on the realism and desirability of focusing exclusively on this preferential option for the poor as Brazil journeys into the future. Acknowledging the universality of Pastoral teachings, Dr. Baptista reflects that “Pastoral does not just exist to visit the homes of the poor, but rather to save the lives of children around the world,” bringing a “spirituality that can serve everyone,” regardless of social class.

**Faith**

A tree, no matter how far its branches stretch, is dead if its roots are severed; so, too, Pastoral da Criança would be cold and lifeless without the faith that serves as its basic foundation. This tradition of faith—embedded into Pastoral both structurally and philosophically—is ecumenical in nature, despite the organization’s Catholic identity. Labeled an “ecumenical philosophy of love” by Pastoral journalist Sonia Pratti, the organization’s faith tradition is one of openness and trust, and manifests itself through the formal and enduring legacy of interreligious dialogue sown through a partnership with the Global Network of Religions for Children and annual leadership role in the World Day of Action and Prayer for Children. Considering how this spirit of ecumenism shapes the organization’s work in her community, Pastoral mother Clidea Vieira explains, “They do not impose anything on you religiously, but instead teach you to listen, reflect, and pass on the blessings that you have.” Clovis Boufleur, Pastoral’s manager of institutional relations, continues: “our mission is never to impose, and always to respect. That is the secret to our international success.”

To understand the exceptional role of faith in Pastoral actions, one need simply look at those volunteers who walk each day with the most fragile and abandoned, as Sister Altoé expounds: “These are men and women who earn nothing, who wear out their shoes playing with children, who work all day under the
hot sun, but who nevertheless go to work, doing so because they believe in and are committed to the sanctity of life, because they have faith.” Sister Altoé proceeds to underscore the universality of faith that exists in all Pastoral work, “We do not train our leaders just because; there is something deeper behind that training; something we call spirituality and mysticism. That spirituality is what we embody through the reality of our work.”

Faith, above all else, drives the notion of caring for the whole person—for nutrition, health, citizenship, and education, among others—but it is the valuing of the human person in and of itself for which faith proves key, as this faith is not solely one of profession and prayer, but rather one which, according to Sister Altoé, “enters into reality” and sees itself represented in the people and communities that Pastoral serves. “We are always in church, listening to the word of God and being comforted. But sometimes we look around at what is going on in the day-to-day and become saddened. Pastoral is there to evangelize, to be that word in the outside world and to comfort those in need,” observes Ms. Vieira, tying this idea of caring for the other into the notional structure of faith set forth by Sister Altoé and others. Indeed, it is exactly Pastoral’s grounding in faith that creates, in the words of nutritionist Caroline Dalabona, “something truly beautiful […] that ends up involving people in a very spontaneous and real way—a way that is truly about caring for the other.”

**Building Community Solidarity**

In the end, all roads seem to lead back to this overarching ideal of solidarity. Whether one takes faith—that, in Dr. Nelson Arns Neumann’s words, “teaches one valuable lessons about solidarity” in any religious tradition—or the preferential option, which promotes a sense of solidarity with the suffering and poor, to be one’s guiding principle, solidarity is necessarily operative. Defined by Dr. Rodrigues dos Santos to be a “superior human value independent of remuneration […]and a collection of attitudes and behaviors that go beyond material possibilities,” solidarity concerns “the desire to help from the heart.” Thinking about Pastoral’s inception, Rubia Pappini reminds us: “Dr. Zilda pioneered a methodology of community involvement in which those from a community are the ones who are responsible for, who have power over their own transformation.” This construction of a complete and interacting community unit through Pastoral services begins with the recruitment of leaders through door knocking campaigns and ends with the collective rejoicing in successes built in the community imagination to belong to the community as a whole during monthly celebration of life events.

Upon researching the current state of primary healthcare in Brazil, however, an obvious conflict becomes apparent between those community health services offered by federal agencies—specifically the Family Health Program—and the volunteer and Church-based programs provided by Pastoral da Criança. As Mr. Boufleur explains: “We will never replace the government, and the government can never replace us.” Dr. Rodrigues dos Santos expands upon this reflection, stating that the fundamental difference between the two is solidarity: “When the people see a public official working for them, they see someone fulfilling an obligation; when the service comes from a place of solidarity, however, the people see reflected the warmth of the human spirit, and are inclined to trust more deeply. The impact is magnified tenfold.”

In terms of service quality, too, this move toward solidarity through community empowerment remains a strong tenet, as these workers, according to Dr. Rodrigues dos Santos, “live in the community, know the psychology of the community, [and] know the suffering of the community, and that knowledge gives them a potential utility thrice that of most professionals.” Dr. Nelson Arns Neumann, Pastoral international coordinator and son of Dr. Zilda Arns Neumann, explains: “The impact that we hope to have is to promote the growth of communities that live in solidarity” and pave the way for the creation of a beautiful friendship between strangers that “serves as a point of rescue for those who are in need.” This paradigm of fostering sustainable, grassroots actions that come from the community to serve the community allows for the construction of those solidarity values necessary to care for the whole child.

**WEIGHING IN ON SHIFTING TRENDS**

Pastoral da Criança developed in response to the pressing need to combat high infant mortality rates that were largely preventable. At the time, diarrhea-induced dehydration was the leading cause of childhood death in Brazil, and Dr. Arns Neumann came up with a plan to fight back. Expensive medications, she realized, were not the answer; rather, children needed to be rehydrated, and a simple combination of water, sugar, and salt—measured in a special, two-sided plastic spoon provided by leaders—could provide as much curative power as formal medical treatments.

Today, Brazil faces many of the same challenges seen in developing nations around the world. Instead of dehydration and malnutrition, in many places economic growth is fostering a trend toward obesity. The statistics are grim: 56 percent of Brazilian babies drink soda regularly before reaching one year of age, and Brazilian children spend on average five hours per day in front of the television screen, as compared to the three hours per day spent in school.” Always with an eye toward the future, Dr. Zilda Arns Neumann studied economic
and scientific research constantly to spot new tendencies. This penchant for forward thinking served Pastoral well as it journeyed into the modern healthcare context. It meant that Pastoral moved precociously from a focus on monitoring infant feeding to a broader focus on nutritional monitoring, thus paving the way for the newest push in education efforts—the Barker Hypothesis, dubbed the “First 1000 Days Campaign” by Pastoral workers. This idea, as described by Pastoral nutritionist Caroline Dalabona, maintains that “the first 1000 days of life, beginning in the womb […] are truly the most important in a child’s life, as they will be what determines a whole series of factors”—everything from blood pressure to height. Expecting that this trend toward caring for life from the moment of conception will hold strong as Brazilians enter into a new stage of socioeconomic development, Ms. Dalabona believes that “by caring for these first 1000 days” of life, “you are caring for the health of an adult” and, by extension, society.

In the policy sphere, Pastoral is confronted with issues surrounding healthcare access inequity and wide health indicator disparities across regions, with the North and Northeast keeping their historic place as the regions with the greatest need and the worst access. Though Pastoral is “well represented in most health departments at the national and state levels,” public health practitioner Dr. Rodrigues dos Santos holds that, “because municipal governments are those that have control over primary healthcare […] Pastoral could do well […] to continue strengthening its ties with municipal health departments in order to ensure that they maintain their role in providing primary health care to their citizens.” Though healthcare outcomes continue to improve across the nation, Pastoral will need to remain vigilant in its advocacy related to issues of healthcare access inequity along socioeconomic and sociopolitical lines, no matter the strength of individual community health indicators. The organization, though, has a solid track record when it comes to monitoring national trends not just in healthcare, but also the complementary requisites for full childhood development. “Pastoral’s actions,” Pernambuco State Coordinator Agenaldo Leão states, smiling from the driver’s seat of a car that he has been piloting for ten of the past fifteen hours in an effort to reach every reflection and evaluation meeting in the Diocese of Nazaré before nightfall, “will always be needed. Much improvement has been made in the 31 years that Pastoral has acted, the healthcare system has improved dramatically, but there is still so much more that needs to be done […] in collaboration with Pastoral through its leaders—through the solidarity of each and every one of them working together. That is how we will make change.”

LIFE IN ABUNDANCE

Planting the seeds of abundant life for generations to come, Pastoral da Criança continues its 30-year mission to defend the basic rights of all children today. Realized through the efforts of hundreds of thousands of community members working in harmony, this mission could not come to fruition were it not for the dedication of a volunteer network of nearly 200,000 individuals. Throughout the course of this project, over 50 individual leaders and coordinators were interviewed, and the one idea that came up time and again in these discussions with workers on the ground was that surrounding the appeal of Pastoral. For some, it was the empowerment of watching communities transform before their eyes; for others, it was the idea of working to build a better future for their children and their children’s children. The most common refrain, however, involved being embraced by a spirit of love. The most powerful and resonant of these declarations of love came from Pernambuco State Coordinator Agenaldo Leão: “It is because of the love of those people who give their lives for others that so many lives have been saved. These people that give are ones who often suffer themselves, but in their suffering feel joy by doing this work to save that other life. In this way, Pastoral is one of the greatest acts of love, of solidarity, and of hope.”
Interview Excerpts

Cleide Maria Vieira, Mother Followed by Pastoral da Criança

What does it mean to be followed by Pastoral?

Being followed by Pastoral is like being followed by a doctor, a friend, a counselor, and a person of God all at once. The leaders bring comfort and experience to our lives—they are indispensable companions. They are very important for the day-to-day, for the soul, and for our health. We are always happier when Pastoral is nearby.

Can you tell me a bit about the differences between services offered by the government and those offered by Pastoral, and why you chose to be followed by Pastoral in that context?

The only advantage of those governmental programs is money, because there is no functional structure behind them. There is no education or aid. They just throw some money at you and tell you to take care of yourself.

Pastoral, in contrast, supports us in everything; they dedicate themselves to us and, at the end of the day, make us better people. They are there to monitor, to talk, to counsel. They do not impose anything on you religiously, but instead teach you to listen, reflect, and pass on the blessings that you have. Pastoral offers structure and support to the family, not just services.

What are the most useful services offered by Pastoral for you and your family?

They give us everything that we would not receive if we were to go to the clinic. It is like having a doctor in your home—not to just to throw medications at you, but rather to come, get to know your situation, ask how you are and what is going on in your family. They weigh our children, check up on our vaccines, and visit us to ask how our mothers and children are, if they have been sick and how they have been treated at the clinic. Everything that Pastoral does is done well, and done with love and dedication.

Dr. Nelson Rodriguez dos Santos, Former Brazilian National Board of Health Coordinator

Could you tell me about the public healthcare system in Brazil and the role of community health education in that system?

I would start by saying this: a good healthcare system—in any part of the world—has its roots in the community. Why? Because it is the only work that effectively carries out actions to prevent disease and allow for early diagnoses—life-saving processes that are both inexpensive and low-tech. Primary healthcare, when well functioning, is able to either avoid or resolve early between 80 percent and 90 percent of all diseases.

Dr. Zilda's Pastoral strengthened Brazil's primary care system greatly. She was not able to use other medical professionals, so she made incredible use of community workers—simple "professionals" that reside in the communities they serve. Dr. Zilda worked to find and identify those community members with the aptitude and desire to participate in the healthcare system to serve their community. These workers live in the community, know the psychology of the community, know the suffering of the community, and that knowledge gives them a potential utility thrice that of most professionals.

So I want you to remember this well: the most important part of our health system is community work.

What do you think has led Pastoral to have such incredible success in the area of community health education?

The valuing of solidarity. I have not been using that word "solidarity" just because; solidarity is a superior human value independent of remuneration, of the material values that mark the human experience. Solidarity is a collection of attitudes and behaviors that go beyond material possibilities—it is about the desire to help from the heart.

When the people see a public official working for them, they see someone fulfilling an obligation; when the service comes from a place of solidarity, however, the people see reflected the warmth of the human spirit, and are inclined to trust more deeply. The impact is magnified tenfold.
What, in your words, is the mission of Pastoral da Criança?

The heart of Pastoral’s mission is the refrain “so that all children may have life, and have it in abundance.” The idea behind this is that simple technologies should arrive to those who are in most need, that simple actions can have a very large impact.

And, thinking of that refrain, what would be the ideal result for a community or family that Pastoral follows?

The impact that we hope to have is to promote the growth of communities that live in solidarity—communities where everyone knows and helps each other. This is perhaps where Pastoral has had the most success, because we know and teach that a child is something precious that needs the attention and care of everyone, not just his parents.

What is the role of faith in Pastoral’s work and how has this role developed over the years?

Faith—in whatever tradition—teaches one valuable lessons about solidarity. One must share what they have with another, recognizing that they also have needs. When our leaders go into the community, they put on their Pastoral tee shirt, and in that moment they are no longer going just as themselves, but in the name of Jesus Christ. The community sees and responds to this. Through this path, two strangers are able to meet each other without enmity, and are able to create a beautiful friendship—a friendship that serves as a point of rescue for those who are in need.

Internationally, this message of faith remains strong. In Guinea-Bissau, for example—a country that is 80 percent Muslim—Pastoral is doing a beautiful job. That is because our message is one of life—a message of fraternity and solidarity that does not encounter resistance. As a group founded in faith, we seek those points that unite us in mutual love and respect.

Is there anything else that you would like to share with me?

Sometimes we expect solutions around the problems in child development to come from ultra-specialized medicines or something of that nature, but what we see in reality is that strengthening of the family is what is going to make the difference for a child. That role of strengthening families is one of the strongest effects of Pastoral, and it is through this strengthening that our children will be able to grow in abundance and with life.

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Sister Vera Lucia Altoé  
National Coordinator, Pastoral da Criança

Thereza Kaiser Baptista  
Technical Assistant, Pastoral da Criança

Clovis Adalberto Boufleur  
Manager of Institutional Relations, Pastoral da Criança

Caroline Caus Dalabona  
Nutritionist, Pastoral da Criança

Arlete Mendes  
Recife Sector Coordinator, Pastoral da Criança

Dr. Nelson Arns Neumann  
Acting International Coordinate, Pastoral da Criança

Rubia Mara Pappini  
Manager of Projects and International Partnerships, Pastoral da Criança

Sonia Melo Pratti  
Journalist, Pastoral da Criança

Dr. Nelson Rodrigues dos Santos  
President of the Institute of Applied Public Health Law in Campinas

Maria das Graças Silva  
Coordinator of the Communications Department Pastoral da Criança

Cleide Maria Vieira  
Participant, Pastoral da Criança
OVERVIEW

Elizabeth “Hopey” Fink is a senior in Georgetown College with majors in Linguistics and Anthropology. Originally from Valparaiso, Indiana, Hopey studied abroad in Dakar, Senegal during her junior year. In July 2014, she traveled to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, to conduct research on the role of Jesuit values in supplementary education, particularly in the context of the Francophone West African education system and interreligious dynamics in the Muslim-majority country. She met with administrators, instructors, and students at CERCLE (the Center for Study and Reflection for Middle School, High School, and University Students), a Jesuit-run study center, and also visited other educational facilities, including an English-immersion primary school and the University of Ouagadougou, in order to examine culture-specific challenges and benefits of cura personalis (“care of the whole person”) and other Jesuit values.

PARTNER INSTITUTION: CENTRE D’ÉTUDE ET RÉFLEXION POUR COLLÉGIENS, LYCÉENS ET ÉTUDIANTS (CERCLE)

CERCLE is a subsidized study center located in the GOUNGHIN neighborhood of OUAGADOUGOU, BURKINA FASO.

Founded in 1987 by the country’s first group of Jesuit priests after they witnessed children studying under streetlights, CERCLE exists to provide a calm and quiet space for students and professionals to learn and be productive. The center currently counts over 400 registered members who have full access to indoor study spaces, outdoor chalkboards, two libraries, a computer room, classrooms, an athletic court, a small grotto, and a range of supplementary courses, training programs, and extracurricular activities. A generator provides electricity even during frequent power outages, and Internet connectivity is available throughout the center’s campus.

A Catholic institution rooted in the Jesuit value of education, CERCLE is nonetheless a place of religious diversity, where Muslims, Catholics, and Protestants regularly interact in an atmosphere of tolerance and dialogue. Girls and boys are nearly equally registered, and the center is open to working professionals as well as students. Members may or may not be enrolled in public or private school; many use the center daily, although some come less frequently. CERCLE offers reinforcement courses in a variety of subjects, as well as technology classes and sessions that cover special topics of interest.
INTRODUCTION

In a country with the lowest literacy rate in the world (at about 29 percent as of 2008 to 2012, according to United Nations Children's Fund), the discourse surrounding education in Burkina Faso has tended to focus on numbers. International development agencies report many statistics on rural primary school construction (7,000 classrooms in 2006, according to the World Bank). Government initiatives, spurred by the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, have set lofty objectives of 100 percent enrollment rates in primary school by 2015. Some NGOs focus on the lagging percentage of girls in school, while others applaud increased allocation of resources in recent years.

Education is a pressing topic for the people of Burkina Faso, for individuals as well as organizations, but the educational landscape in this West African nation is more complex than development statistics can portray, especially amidst recent political unrest. The legacy of French colonization is still fresh in the realities of Burkinabé people, deeply permeating the infrastructures and sociopolitical systems of the government and society. The French influence remains especially strong in the education system, which is highly standardized, with little room for creativity and innovation. In addition, religious and ethnic diversity have shaped Burkina Faso’s history, and socioeconomic inequalities are stark. Within the confines of a stagnant political system, motivation to receive an education is often overwhelmed by feelings of powerlessness in the face of corruption and a weak economy; many citizens do not believe that education will lead to a job.

The cyclical nature of poverty, corruption, and illiteracy may seem to paint a bleak picture for this country’s future, but optimistic cycles of a different sort are at work through the efforts of a variety of actors in the education realm. CERCLE, a Jesuit-run study center located in Burkina Faso’s capital city of Ouagadougou, has been promoting educational change at the micro level for over a quarter of a century. This report identifies the ways in which the Jesuit value of cura personalis, or care of the whole person, is applied in the context of the Francophone West African education system in place in Burkina Faso, focusing on the role of religious diversity in the country’s education systems. With CERCLE as a case study, this report draws on numerous informal conversations and over fifteen one-hour interviews with an array of individuals and organizations in Ouagadougou.

In presenting CERCLE and its partner institutions as an example of an innovative and promising approach, this report first gives a brief overview of the various dynamics that have shaped the education system in Burkina Faso, as well as a short description of the country’s religious landscapes, including the history of the Society of Jesus in Burkina. The report then focuses on CERCLE’s approach to education through its practices of inclusion, accompaniment, integral formation, expanding opportunities, and collaboration. It concludes by highlighting the challenges and possibilities that face the study center in the future.

A DIVERSE LEGACY OF COLONIZATION

Like several other countries in West Africa, Burkina Faso was a French colony until the middle of the twentieth century. Before the area came under European control, it was inhabited by many ethnic groups who practiced traditional religions and subsistence agriculture. In 1896, the French defeated the ruler of the dominant Mossi tribe, the Moro Naba, and established a colonial presence. What is now Burkina Faso became an official French West African territory in 1947 under the name Upper Volta. As independence swept across West Africa, the Republic of Upper Volta officially became independent from France in 1960 and adopted a democratic constitution. Upper Volta was renamed Burkina Faso in 1984 and experienced multiple coups d’état, military regimes, and rampant political corruption in the decades that followed independence. In October 2014, its most recent president, Blaise Compaore, was ousted from the position he had held since 1987 by a popular uprising.*

The process of decolonization has left many remnants from the decades of French rule. French is the official language of government and education, although regional languages like Mòoré, Mandinka, and Bambara predominate in informal interactions. According to many of the Burkinabé people interviewed, Burkina Faso’s economy is still highly connected to that of France, both directly (through trade and aid) and indirectly (through migration and dependence on France for many educational and business materials). Despite the country’s narrow resource base, Burkina Faso has made strides in economic growth since the early 1990s through sound economic policies, though its development status remains low.

Post-Colonial Education

Burkina Faso’s national education system is directly modeled on the French system; it is managed by the Ministry of Basic Education and the Ministry of Secondary and Higher Education and of Scientific Research. Primary school begins at age seven, and teaching is entirely in French. Secondary education includes a four-year junior high school program, after which a student can choose to attend a vocational school or a senior high school. Senior high school education,
normally lasting three years, ends with the Baccalaureate exam, or “the BAC,” the successful completion of which can allow a student to attend university. There are three institutions of higher education in the country, including the University of Ouagadougou, the Polytechnic University of Bobo-Dioulasso, and the Teachers Training College of Koudougou.

The French system implemented in Burkina emphasizes theoretical learning, and many Burkinabé believe that it tends to form all students to become civil servants. University student Raïnatou Ouedraogo expresses her frustration with this model: “The French system that we use here does not encourage individual enterprise. It forms us to fit the system. And it is general. We learn almost entirely theory.”

At the primary level, a major problem is access and lack of resources, especially in rural areas. Dropout and repetition rates for secondary schools are high, especially in the final Baccalaureate examination year (between 35 percent and 40 percent over the 2006 to 2012 period). For universities, frequent teacher strikes and overcrowded classes disrupt academic calendars; one school year can take more than thirteen months at the University of Ouagadougou. Public education is not free, even at the primary level, and because informal networks can often be more helpful in finding a job than a degree, the costs of an education sometimes outweigh the benefits for many impoverished families. According to university student Mamadou Sibalo, “The system of education in Burkina Faso is chaotic…There are more private schools in Ouagadougou than public schools. The population does not believe in the system of education.” Private schools, some run by religious congregations and others by for-profit companies, are often viewed as better than public schools because they receive private funding for resources.

Religious Landscapes

Interwoven into the narrative of colonization and decolonization in Burkina Faso is a complex history of religion in society. According to Fr. Jean Ilboudo, S.J., one of the first Jesuits in Burkina Faso, traditional belief systems are based on kinship and headed by the chief of a family. These traditional religious practices, often varied according to particular ethnic group or locality, are still prominent in Burkina Faso, with at least 20 percent of the population adhering solely to traditional religion and many more incorporating traditional beliefs with Islam or Christianity. Fr. Ilboudo, a historian specializing in religious conversion in West Africa, describes the arrival of these two Abrahamic religions: “Islam arrived here before Christianity, in the 1500s. People here had contact with North Africa, and Islam was brought from there mostly by merchants…they converted people with their merchandise but also with Islam. Several traditional chiefs began to convert, and thus Islam began to spread…Christianity arrived in 1900. There began to be Christian converts—we do not have very precise statistics, but we think that Christians are currently 20 percent [of the population in Burkina Faso], counting Catholics and Protestants. Muslims make up about 40 to 50 percent, and traditional religion remains the most important…”

Religion is intricately connected to education. Informal Qur’anic schools were the first educational institutions in Burkina Faso, dating back to pre-colonial times. Reading and writing Arabic is necessary to become a religious leader in Islam, and according to Fr. Ilboudo, this has traditionally been a driving force in education. In addition, one of the first things that Christian missionaries did upon arriving in what is now Burkina Faso was establish schools. Christian education continues to be an important part of the private education system; many different congregations run well-respected schools at the elementary and secondary levels.

Burkina’s interreligious landscape is characterized, in general, by tolerance. Interreligious marriage is quite common, and many children grow up surrounded by the coexistence of several different faith traditions. This reality creates a unique environment for students of multiple faiths at a Catholic educational institution like CERCLE.

THE JESUITS IN BURKINA AND THE FOUNDING OF CERCLE

The Society of Jesus, a Catholic male religious order founded by St. Ignatius in the sixteenth century, was first brought to Burkina Faso in 1974 by a French priest named François Peltier at the request of the bishop of Ouagadougou. The congregation was conceived around a set of practices and values that have come to be known as Ignatian spirituality. The Jesuits’ reputation as missionaries and their focus on education and progressive integration of science and religion have allowed them to uniquely serve communities in which they have a presence.

The four original Jesuits soon came to understand the particular challenges faced by the Burkinabé people. Fr. Ilboudo describes the initial motivation for the creation of a study center in Ouagadougou: “The fathers saw students in the streets at night, studying their lessons under the streetlights outside. Cars passed, cyclist passed, people passed, but they were sitting there with their books and notebooks. Could we think of a center where we could make available rooms and calm spaces...
where people could come to study? That was the original idea. Often they were in the streets because there was no electricity at home, and there was too much noise in their families, thus homes were not favorable places to study. The center was created to welcome students, but it was not a school, just a space to study before returning home.”

In seeking a space to construct such a center, the Jesuits reached out to the parish of St. Peter’s Church in the Ouagadougou neighborhood of Gounghin. The Society of Jesus negotiated a deal with the diocese to build a study center on the grounds of the parish. The buildings of CERCLE belong to the Jesuits, but the land itself belongs to the parish. Norbert Nikiema, a security guard at the center who has worked there since its founding, explains the immediate effect in the neighborhood: “The neighbors—the families who lived in the area—thought it was a very good thing. Because the price was affordable.”

This accessibility stems from the center’s Jesuit mission to reach all people in need. Since the founding of CERCLE in 1987, the Jesuits in Burkina Faso have sought out additional ways to serve the Burkinabé people. In 1997, Paam-Yōodo, a spiritual center, was established in Ouagadougou as a space for spiritual direction and retreats for both laypeople and religious congregations. Most recently, Spanish Jesuit Fr. Agostino Goytisolo, S.J. has headed an effort to create Centre d’Esperance (Center of Hope), an advocacy and treatment center for HIV/AIDS that focuses on sustainability and combating social stigmas associated with the disease, which is present in Burkina Faso although the country is not an area of high prevalence.

The Jesuits in Burkina Faso strive to integrate their values into each of these projects. All of their work is connected. Education offers a particularly significant opportunity to draw upon these connections between spirituality, service, and knowledge. Fr. Jacques Ouedraogo, S.J., director of Paam Yōodo and former director of CERCLE, describes how Jesuits in West Africa approach education: “We [have] what we call human formation; when students graduate, they are not just
a head—they also have cultivated values. We provoke them to reflect on their life, on society, on the environment, so they can have a more or less balanced life, and a family life. These are the values that we instill in the students—in the language we use, it is called cura personalis—the care of the whole person, individually.”

CERCLE’S APPROACH

In the context of the Center for Study and Reflection in Ouagadougou, cura personalis plays out on both an institutional level, through policies and discernment of mission, and an individual level, through choices and interactions. These institutional and individual practices are particularly significant in Burkina Faso’s educational system in that they supplement the secular and standardized French system.

Inclusion

At the most basic level, CERCLE reflects the spirit of caring for the whole person by attempting to be accessible to as many whole persons as possible. Registration occurs throughout the year and must be renewed each year. An individual must present two pieces of photo identification to register, and pay an annual membership fee calculated according to grade level; this is 6150 CFA (approximately 12 USD) for middle school students, 7000 CFA (13.50 USD) for high school and university students, and 8000 CFA (15.50 USD) for working professionals. The center advertises its services on the radio, in newspapers, and in schools.

Jean Houangge, a Jesuit candidate working as CERCLE’s administrative and academic director, describes the measures taken to assist those who cannot afford the yearly membership fees: “Sometimes people can only pay partially. We give them a special type of card, and not the member card, and allow them to have time…there are generally 20 to 25 social cases like this each year. We work with them to find a solution.”

Students and workers come from all over the city to study at CERCLE, many of them riding bicycles or mopeds that are parked in a lot on the center’s campus. The center serves a population that is diverse not only socioeconomically, but also religiously. According to the center’s director, Fr. Augustin Some, S.J., “Perhaps the majority [of registered members] are actually Muslim. But there are also some Protestants and many Catholics. Everyone is here together. The formation we give is formation for all—in human life, in spiritual life, in our community and our country.”

Inclusion and tolerance are explicitly important to the Jesuit administrators and teachers at CERCLE, but they are also simply a part of the reality of many students’ experiences. Muslim students often say their daily prayers—a requirement of Islam—in the courtyard of the study center and are even provided with buckets of water for their necessary ablutions. Raïnatou Ouedraogo, who comes from a family in which some members are Muslim and others are Catholic, finds CERCLE to be a place of dialogue and openness: “Sometimes we have debates about religion. We often have prayers as well, and the Stations of the Cross on Wednesdays. It is true that these services are for Catholics, but everyone is welcome here. Once I even saw a flyer for a Protestant group that was allowed to be posted here. Non-Catholics often come when the fathers say Mass here as well.”

Accompaniment

The center’s main mission, according to Fr. Some, is to offer a space that is quiet and calm for studies. But its parallel mission to “accompany each student in care of the whole person” cannot be extracted from this vision; accompaniment permeates all aspects of the Jesuits’ interactions with individuals. Fr. Some describes this particularly Jesuit concept in the context of CERCLE: “The pedagogy of accompaniment says that we know everyone, and that we listen to everyone. We understand that a student’s social life could affect his studies. There are many students who have family troubles, but through accompaniment, we are able to help them understand where they are.”

As the center’s director, Fr. Some himself is always available to talk with students, whether by appointment or in casual conversation. The center’s administrators also hope to foster an environment in which personal relationships among staff and students are able to develop. André Kim Ouedraogo is a
university student who works as administrator of the lending library at CERCLE; he is a candidate for the Society of Jesus. He speaks of the importance of communication in his role: “I communicate a lot with the students…I learn their manners; I help them. Those who come here are my friends. Because I am serving them, I am obligated to listen to them and pay attention to them…The Jesuits understand that scholastic education is not everything. Academics often do not account for how people react to certain things and how important it is to know people. For example, the rental period at the library is ten days. If a student has not returned a book in a month, I can easily contact him and ask what is wrong. Oftentimes he will apologize and explain himself, and there is a good reason.”

Discipline at the study center often takes the form of a conversation between the transgressor and a staff person. This line of communication is open as a way for the center to receive feedback as well. A little box outside Fr. Some’s office reads “New Ideas,” and students are welcome to look at the center critically for its betterment. Paulin Bayala, a Jesuit candidate serving as a specialist in CERCLE’s reading room as part of his formation, describes the importance of feedback in the implementation of the reading room, which contains current and archived newspapers, magazines, reference material, and comic books: “Before we put the service in place, we made a little paper [survey] to collect opinions, to develop the center, to see how we could help…lots of people participated. Each wrote which document he or she wanted.”

**Integral Formation**

The supportive environment for students at CERCLE extends from academic help to spiritual direction to personal counseling. The center’s staff members stress the importance of *formation intégrale*, or integrating all aspects of development and learning together, in their approach to *cura personalis*. Fr. Some explains how this relates to another Jesuit ideal, that of the Magis, or doing more: “We want to cultivate a culture of excellence—the Magis, going deeper. We utilize what we call *formation intégrale* to form students—people—to be able to be *with* and for others. To this end, we proposed a series of activities to supplement studies.”

CERCLE seeks instructors who are familiar with Jesuit pedagogy, relying on registration fees to pay professors for teaching the support courses offered at the center. Professor Marc Tapsoba is a former Jesuit who currently teaches French and philosophy at a private institution and also serves as an instructor in English, conflict resolution, and Latin at CERCLE. He contrasts the individualized attention given at the study center with the mainstream pedagogical approaches used in Burkinabé high schools and universities: “You cannot just come and give a lecture. You have to also encourage original research and reading. During my formation, I benefited greatly from professors who had studied in the US and knew the system of papers—that is not done here, even at the university.”

In order to cultivate individual initiative, CERCLE also encourages group work among students. In fact, a majority of students who utilize the center’s spaces do so to study with friends (or sometimes strangers who become friends) at the outdoor tables and chalkboards. Study groups are organized by students themselves, and oftentimes younger students seek guidance from older students and workers. Wilfried Zoundi, a working professional in the field of human rights law, often uses the Internet at CERCLE, and while he is there, he is “always disposed to help” students who are interested in law.

Members at CERCLE integrate their learning into their casual conversations and interactions. English conversation groups and informal debates are frequent, and topics like science and religion and interreligious dynamics are not taboo subjects. Many students are activists at their home institutions, like Mamadou Sibalo, who is a member of the General Students’ Union at the University of Ouagadougou. He expresses frustration with how the public school reacts to student voices, saying “If we organize strikes at the university, nobody listens to us. They say we are being manipulated by political forces. That is why the conditions are still not good.”

At CERCLE, Sibalo has found a place where his opinions can be heard. The center fosters dialogue around current events by providing free newspapers available each day in the reading room; Fr. Some asserts that awareness about the world is part of integral formation. Indeed, the fact that CERCLE’s spaces and resources are conducive to informal conversations allows...
the center to cultivate authentic dialogues on a variety of issues that students themselves find important.

These informal spaces are also often sites of extracurricular activities. Membership at the center includes access to the outdoor athletic court. Students organize soccer matches on Thursdays and Sundays, and at other times pickup games of soccer and basketball are common. In May, the center hosted a Culture Night, the culmination of student performances in areas like theater, choir, and comedy. In the past, CERCLE has also offered cinema and theater clubs for its members, but due to student interest and organizational timing, these are not currently functional. Paulin Bayala, the reading room specialist, explains his hope that these will soon be reinstated: “Père Augustin [Some] has been focused on figuring out how best to serve people’s needs at the center. We are talking with the students, and perhaps next year we will have more clubs than this year…Many kids want to be involved in these things, but we do not offer them currently at CERCLE.” Bayala is not alone in his sentiments; the spirit of improvement and growth is everywhere at the center.

**EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES**

In keeping with its Jesuit values, CERCLE has been striving to assess its mission in the rapidly changing Burkinabé society. Faced with a unique set of challenges, the administrators of the center—as well as other stakeholders like students, instructors, and collaborators—reflect regularly on new ways to expand opportunities for caring for the whole person. Through collaboration, modernization, and initiatives to reach the most underserved populations, CERCLE brings the idea of *cura personalis* beyond its own walls.

**Challenges**

Although CERCLE is not affiliated formally with the national Burkinabé education system, it is affected by many of the system’s problems because its members operate within it. Thus, when university students struggle with inconsistent academic calendars due to a strike, CERCLE also sees inconsistent membership and usage patterns. Because on a national level
women tend to receive less education than men do (in part since they typically have more household duties), the center also sees small differences in the enrollment numbers for girls and boys. Additionally, boys tend to pursue advanced classes at CERCLE, like English conversation or conflict management, more often than girls do.

A recent challenge faced by the administration was a result of the French system’s emphasis on the importance of the “BAC” exam at the end of high school. Several years ago, CERCLE began offering support courses for those who had already taken this exam and failed. These courses covered subjects that were on the BAC, including French and mathematics, and were tailored to those who could not afford to stay in school until they passed the exam. Because registering for a class at CERCLE was less expensive than enrolling in full-time school, even public school, many students utilized this support program as an alternative to repeating the final year of high school. Professor Tapsoba explains how these courses fit into the Jesuit mission of the center: “The beneficiaries must be those who have the greatest need—the ‘preferential option for the poor’…The poor in this context are those students who have failed—once, twice, three times.”

When CERCLE expanded these courses to cater to those taking the middle school exam as well, it saw a large increase in enrollment numbers, up to 1,000 members in 2011. Along with these new students, however, came plenty of noise and disruption. Tapsoba explains, “It was like a middle school. Those who came to work in the libraries were annoyed.” The center also faced a questionable ethical issue with one of the instructors it employed. Upon discernment with the Jesuit provincial, the Jesuits at CERCLE decided to halt these particular support courses in 2012 in order to return to the calm and quiet space that was the original conception of the center and to assert more control over the learning environment. Since this cancellation, enrollment numbers have declined to around 400, which has eliminated the noise complaints but has left some students in local communities without an inexpensive option to learn material for their exams. A major challenge at this point is finding a balance between serving these populations and upholding the standards of the Jesuits’ morals and mission.

The other challenge most often cited by both students and staff at the center is the lack of adequate resources. The center’s two libraries (one for consultation and one for borrowing) and its reading room are stocked with mostly old books and documents, some of which are outdated. Because many books come from international donations and Jesuit collections, they are sometimes not suited to the level for which they are being sought. André Kim Ouedraogo, the lending library administrator, describes the reasons for and impact of the lack of resources: “The majority of the books here are donations. They mostly come from France. We do not have enough African books…students look for African books often…and there are many books that are never used.” Finding appropriate documents can be a challenge for the administration logistically, and it is certainly a challenge for students themselves, who often have no other way of accessing the information they need.

Modernization

Caring for the whole person in the modern world means paying attention to the ways in which society is changing. One of the major ways that CERCLE is combating the issues of resources and access is through a systematic process of improving its information technology. Until very recently, the center did not have access to computers for its libraries. Through grants from the Society of Jesus, it has begun to computerize its resources, beginning with the cataloging of the consultation library. Madame Grâce Ouedraogo, the administrator of this library, describes the process: “Now, everything is done manually…You find the code and look for the document…we would like for all of this to be digitized. We put a machine there, and you type the name of the document that you want to see if the document is there. You can then look for the document. For the students, this way is much easier. We have already started…we are actually at the next phase [in the digitization process]. We have recorded all of the documents that we have in our library. And now we are at the listing phase.”
A similar procedure is underway in the lending library to register all books and documents. The center has contracted an information company to assist them in the process, but as of now relies mainly on visiting Jesuit scholastics who are trained in information technology. CERCLE staff members believe that this process will allow more people to access resources that might otherwise be expensive and out of reach.

The center also addresses information access through skills-based training. Thirty-hour introductory information technology classes are offered to members and to non-members for a small fee; even during school breaks, these courses operate in the center’s computer lab, which is stocked with ten computers. For these classes, students sit two per computer and learn about basic computer operation as well as Microsoft Office and essential Internet skills. Informatique (information) classes have an even more diverse enrollment than other CERCLE offerings; middle-aged women learn alongside enthusiastic young boys. The advent of technology has allowed for advantageous specialization in the job market and education fields for those who understand how to operate a computer and other basic pieces of technology. On the first day of Professor Alassane Bireba’s introductory computer class, all 18 individuals registered for the course said they were there to learn skills that would be of practical use to them.

In this vein, CERCLE has also made a point to implement English support courses and study groups. Fr. Some believes that English is necessary to succeed in the globalizing world of the twenty-first century, a sentiment that is echoed by Mamadou Sibalo, who studies English at the University of Ouagadougou. Sibalo shares, “I felt that if I could study English, there would be a lot of good opportunities.” At CERCLE, students meet among themselves to practice speaking in English; at their high schools and universities, classes are too large to foster conversational skills and instead focus on writing and comprehension. The study center offers an extra dimension to language learning to prepare students.

Fr. Jacques Ouedraogo offers insight into the unique significance of cura personalis in light of modernization: “When society evolves, when people have more material goods to feed their hunger and move them from place to place, this has a great positive effect on their education. And access to information—with the Internet—opens even more the possibilities for young people…They can understand that they are not alone in the world, and that their actions have an impact on others. As Jesuits, we are able to regard society and encourage students to reflect on in—so that they can be neither slave to it nor apart from it, so they find what is good and what is dangerous, so they forge a personality.”

**Collaboration to Reach All**

Part of this reflection on students’ place in society can come from engaging with others in a collaborative way. CERCLE encourages such interaction and also collaborates institutionally with other organizations and individuals. At the most fundamental level, the center acknowledges the connections between success in secondary school and the foundations laid by families and teachers in younger grades. Family dynamics can present an obstacle to some young people’s studies, as is the case with Abdoul Simpore, a university student whose household consists of over 15 children by his father’s three wives and is thus not an environment conducive to studying. Yet many Burkinabé students speak of the importance of education in their families. Simpore relates to the idea that a diploma for a student is really a diploma for an entire family, saying, “Here, people do not really think very much about individual pride. My pride is my family.”

Sister Philomina Ifeoma Emelife, a Nigerian sister in the religious congregation Sisters of Divine Mercy and assistant director of the Divine Mercy primary school in Ouagadougou, speaks of the difficulty in engaging parents in their children’s studies from a young age. She describes her own experience with families: “Many are not even interested in helping their children…They are just business, or work, or whatever…I try to invite them to come to school and listen to how the child is doing or to meet with me about their performance, but some of them just say, ‘Do whatever you want.’”

CERCLE, along with other private institutions like Divine Mercy School, attempts to engage parents in investing in education as much as possible. Fr. Some tries to meet the parents of students enrolled at the center, and he encourages mothers and fathers to enroll in classes like information technology as well as their children so the entire family can benefit from a holistic education. University student Raïnatou Ouedraogo believes that collaborating with parents can strengthen individual student performance as well as access for entire underserved groups, like girls. She offers a collective, collaborative perspective on increasing reach to girls: “We are fighting. Like boys, we can go far if we want to. It is a question of will and desire. Women are not just makeup and earrings and clothes. Women are intelligence. We can get diplomas…in fact, we have a saying that says, ‘If you educate a girl, you educate a nation.’ Because women are the ones who are going to transmit their education to their children.” In her spare time at CERCLE, Ouedraogo reaches out to younger girls and works with them on their studies.

Key partners for CERCLE at the institutional level are bookstores, libraries, and universities, which form part
of the center’s network of instructors, supporters, and suppliers. The center collaborates with the University of Ouagadougou bookstore to order new documents and books for its consultation and lending libraries and also visits independent bookstores like the African Youth Bookstore and various religious shops. Collaboration has not reached its full potential, however. For example, Fr. Some expresses his wish to connect the databases of CERCLE’s libraries with those of the library at the University of Ouagadougou and the independent Missionaries of Africa Library. There is no public library in Burkina Faso; each library requires membership, including that at the university.

Despite the institutional and infrastructural limits such as this lack of public information services, other untapped resources in Ouagadougou exist. The Pelican Center, for example, is a study center run by the Missionaries of Africa, another Catholic congregation. Founded several years after CERCLE, the Pelican Center is a much smaller operation, with fewer classes and spaces, but many of the centers’ services overlap. Potential collaboration between the centers could allow for an exchange of ideas and resources, foster a dialogue between the Jesuits and their religious brothers, and create a mechanism to share limited supplies. Other religious groups in Burkina Faso that work in public health, social services, and other domains could also contribute to the rounding out of CERCLE’s care of the whole person through collaboration.

CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD

In recent years, CERCLE has undergone changes in its structure and programming that have created new challenges but also new opportunities for growth in the center’s commitment to cura personalis. In a setting surrounded by poverty, access to education is a question of social justice. As the Jesuits at CERCLE emphasize, however, education’s justice merits go beyond issues of access. They believe that quality education is a right of all people, and that quality education cares for the whole person, forming minds and bodies prepared to engage with society and be men and women for and with others.

Through practices of inclusion, accompaniment, and integral formation, CERCLE’s community works to ensure that all are able to be educated according to this mission, regardless of religious identity or gender. The center’s modernization and collaboration efforts continually expand opportunities for the students and workers it serves, always grounded in discernment. These opportunities expose CERCLE’s members to the real world of education interacting in society and also expose other institutions and individuals in Burkinabé society to the values of the Society of Jesus, including cura personalis.

At the time of this writing, construction has begun for a similar center in Zignare, a small town 30 miles away from Ouagadougou. This new center, funded by Italian Jesuits, will implement many of the same features as CERCLE, but its different setting will pose unique challenges and opportunities to define cura personalis. The Zignare center, when it is completed in 2016, will provide an obvious source of collaboration for the existing center, but CERCLE can also engage more with already existing institutions.

The way forward for the alternative education model of CERCLE will be shaped by the contextual challenges unique to Burkina Faso, including the legacy of French colonization in the school system, the country’s religious diversity, the political stagnation, and the growing youth population. With the cura personalis approach to education, these challenges can be met with attention to individual growth.

*Addendum: As of this report’s publication, the political situation in Burkina Faso remains unstable. After Compaore’s forced resignation, the military took control of the government; an agreement has been reached to hold demographic elections in 2015. These developments have disrupted academic calendars and sparked renewed debates about education in Burkina Faso.
INTERVIEW EXCERPTS

FR. AUGUSTIN SOME, S.J., DIRECTOR, CERCLE, OUAGADOUGOU, BURKINA FASO

Could you tell me a bit more about the history of the study center?

Our mission is first to offer a space that is quiet and calm for studies. Second, to accompany—to accompany each student in care of the whole person, or cura personalis. The pedagogy of accompaniment says that we know everyone, and that we listen to everyone. We understand that a student’s social life could affect his studies. There are many students who have family troubles, but through accompaniment, we are able to help them understand where they are. The demand becomes bigger and bigger.

FR. JEAN ILBOUDO, S.J., DIRECTOR, CO-FOUNDER, CERCLE, OUAGADOUGOU, BURKINA FASO

What is your biggest challenge and then the thing you are most proud of?

The biggest challenge is that we feel strongly that the Christian faith is not a faith that you can live en masse. It is an individual faith, and the individual must live his faith with authenticity. The spiritual exercises focus on this. We want to form people who live their experiences authentically. How can we transmit the values that we carry? The value of service, the value of respect, the respect of self, the respect of justice. We want to provide a space for individuals to grow in these ways, even in the context of corruption and other struggles.

MAMADOU SIBALO, STUDENT, UNIVERSITY OF OUAGADOUGOU, BURKINA FASO

What pedagogy would you use as a professor? Would you change anything about the normal ways of teaching here?

A sick person cannot develop. An illiterate person cannot develop. We must first reorganize our priorities. There is a lot of inequality in Burkina Faso, and we need to harness the power of social institutions to fight this poverty. I think it would be good to have conversations with countries like the United States on education. We need to be fully independent of France, and we are not now, especially with the French system of education. We need a revolution among the Burkinabe people. Each Burkinabe has a right to education and health, and we must demand that from our government.

MARC TAPSOBA, PROFESSOR, OUAGADOUGOU, BURKINA FASO

Could you begin by introducing yourself and your work?

In terms of Jesuit pedagogy, we have here what we call cura personalis. The center was founded as a place for study and reflection. We have chalkboards and libraries to help the poor children of this neighborhood. There were not a lot of places for them to study. The Society underwent discernment here. The philosophy of the Jesuits is to do what you can where you are. So they reflected on the best way to serve the people here, and they decided it was in the area of education. They made sure to have electricity and books and silence—and accompaniment services. This is all part of cura personalis: care of the whole person.

WILFRIED ZOUNDI, HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER, OUAGADOUGOU, BURKINA FASO

What are the specific challenges in Burkina Faso for human rights?

The population does not have knowledge of the laws. They do not know what to do in situations where the law is on their side. It is necessary to have education of human rights throughout this country. Because, for example, if I do not know the law, I might hit someone, and when I am legally punished, I do not have any excuses. If people know the consequences of their actions they are more likely to make better decisions. Secondly, our institutions present a challenge. They themselves too often do not respect the law. Heads of state, politicians, bureaucrats—they are not accountable. Our president has been in office for almost thirty years, “legally” because he has changed what legal means. Everyone must respect constitutional law.
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OVERVIEW

In the summer of 2014, Gianna Maita, a senior in Georgetown College majoring in Justice and Peace Studies and minoring in Arabic, partnered with the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA), a Jesuit institution of higher education in Managua, Nicaragua. Gianna conducted interviews with students, faculty, staff, and community members about service-learning, community-based research, and other programs that engage UCA students in marginalized, local communities and the broader Nicaraguan society. Her research focuses on student involvement in social justice issues within the context of Nicaraguan history and the current political atmosphere of the country.

PARTNER INSTITUTION: UNIVERSIDAD CENTROAMERICANA, NICARAGUA

The Universidad Centroamericanica (UCA), or Central American University, in Managua is the first private university in Central America and a member of the Association of Universities Entrusted to the Society of Jesus in Latin America (AUSJAL). As a part of the AUSJAL, the UCA is committed to a policy of social responsibility, which requires it to respond to social needs in its communities through the curriculum and through research. AUSJAL Universities have a responsibility to develop responses to social challenges that successfully promote sustainable human development and are motivated by the promotion of justice, solidarity, and social equality.

The UCA “wants to be a university interested in forming citizens who care about their country,” as Gaston Ortega, the coordinator of UCA’s Social Service Program, explains. It does this through its curriculum, academic research institutions, and extra-curricular programs that facilitate student engagement in the transformation of Nicaraguan society and learning about equality and justice in solidarity with the communities they serve.

INTRODUCTION

In 1838, Nicaragua became officially independent from the Federal Republic of Central America, although it was under the forceful political, economic, and military influence of the United States until 1933. Through the late 1920s and early 1930s, Augusto César Sandino, a Nicaraguan nationalist, lead a guerrilla movement against the United States occupation. After 1933, Nicaragua’s government was left to Juan Bautista Sacasa, who was forced to resign by Anastasio Somoza García,
the wealthy chief director of the National Guard. xxxiii Somoza García’s family’s repressive military dictatorship lasted for four decades; although it was supported by the United States government, it failed to improve the lives of poor Nicaraguans. xxxiii Upon Somoza García’s assassination in 1956, his older son Luis Somoza DeBayle took over the presidency and younger son, Anastasio “Tachito” Somoza Debayle, a West Point graduate, took over the National Guard. Tachito retained control over the National Guard when he became president in 1967, thereby consolidating his power over Nicaraguan politics. xxxiii

When Managua, the capital, was shaken by an enormous earthquake in 1972, international aid relief poured into Nicaragua, but never made it to the people; the Somoza dictatorship, under Tachito, illegally appropriated and mismanaged the funds, increasing the devastation of Nicaragua’s poor after the earthquake. xxiii The government’s horrific response to the earthquake became a turning point for the Sandinista National Liberation Front, a socialist movement named after Augusto César Sandino which had been resisting the Somozas since the 1960s. They began to use guerrilla tactics against the Somoza dictatorship in 1974, and gained considerable support among Nicaragua’s poorest people. Violence between the Sandinistas, many of them teenaged fighters, and the National Guard killed many young Nicaraguans from 1974 to 1979. When Tachito resigned in 1979, the hardline Sandinista faction led by Daniel and Humberto Ortega took control of Nicaragua with other members of a junta. xxxv

The junta government made a pledge to work for political pluralism, a mixed economic system and a nonaligned foreign policy. xxvi Jesuit priests played a large role in improving Nicaragua during this time: Father Fernando Cardenal even became the minister of education, though he was excommunicated by the Vatican during his time as a politician. The Jesuit priest led efforts to increase literacy in Nicaragua through the National Literacy Crusade and the Basic Education Program. However, the Sandinista government struggled to remain pluralistic and uncorrupt. The Ortega brothers became increasingly power-hungry, and pushed out non-Sandinista politicians. xxvii The United States attempted to influence Nicaragua once more, fearing that the socialist Sandinista government would turn toward Communism; when political manipulation failed the US government resorted to violence. By indirectly funding Somoza’s Contra forces and laying explosive mines in Nicaragua’s harbors, the US prompted the Sandinistas to increase their military spending, redirecting those funds from social programs that were helping the poor. xxviii

Nicaraguans became disillusioned by the Sandinista vision in the face of a new kind of government corruption and intense hardships brought about by US military actions. xxix The first free and fair Nicaraguan elections in 1990 unseated the Sandinistas in favor of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, leader of the National Opposition Union. President Chamorro’s neo-liberal government brought about conservative reform and concessions to the US government that ended the Contra War. xl After Chamorro’s presidency and several years under the Constitutionalist Liberalist Party, Daniel Ortega was elected president in 2007 under the slogan “Nicaragua Socialista Cristiana y Solidaria!” Rosario Murillo, President Ortega’s wife, speaks each morning for 15 minutes to inform the people of what is occurring in their country; this is the media’s main source of information about the government’s activities—a challenge for those in the education field, as discussed later.

The civic engagement of young people has evolved in Nicaragua as its political environment has changed. There is a marked difference between youth involvement in Nicaragua during the Sandinista revolution from 1979 through the early 1980s—when it was a cultural norm for young people to serve in solidarity with those who were less fortunate—and today, when universities must push students to connect with disadvantaged communities to learn and build relationships. On the campus of the UCA, this change in youth interest in civic engagement...
is especially prominent.

Youth engagement in social justice through the past few decades and specifically on the campus of the UCA was explored in 20 one-hour interviews with various people living and working at the UCA and several individuals connected to the university’s social justice initiatives. Interviewees included: directors of two social justice- and education-minded institutes at the UCA; the former minister of education of Nicaragua, who is now a Jesuit priest; eight faculty and staff of the UCA; nine UCA students majoring in accounting, philosophy, architecture, sociology, marketing, and economics; one former UCA student; one local small business owner and community partner; and one former Georgetown student and novice Jesuit who was working at the UCA over the summer.

This report first examines the historical context of youth engagement in solidarity and social justice, and then focuses on the current context of student engagement at the UCA. An analysis of the potential reasons for current student interest in social justice—including the political context of Nicaraguan education, the economic backgrounds of students, and their own attitudes towards social justice issues—will follow. The report concludes by comparing the impacts that the different initiatives have on students’ comprehension of and critical thinking about social justice issues and by exploring further possibilities presented by the university’s new social service program.

**YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL JUSTICE IN NICARAGUA’S HISTORY**

First launched in 1980, the literacy campaigns in Nicaragua were national initiatives organized by the Ministry of Education and strove to teach all Nicaraguans to read. The Sandinista victory had only recently occurred before the National Literacy Crusade began without much organization. Father Fernando Cardenal remembers that the Sandinista leaders “gave me the
order [to create a literacy campaign] but they did not give me the money!” In order to create a successful, cost-effective campaign, Cardenal asked the youth of Nicaragua for their service as volunteers. The largest part of the National Teaching Corps, which was the government-organized umbrella organization for all volunteers who participated in the literacy campaigns, was the Popular Literacy Army (EPA), led by the national Sandinista youth organization, Juventud Sandinista Diecinueve de Julio. They Youth brigadistasp in the EPA traveled to poor rural and urban areas to teach their fellow Nicaraguans to read. In rural areas, brigadistas stayed with host families for five months, teaching and completing their own chores with the family. They built strong relationships based on solidarity; as the youth taught their families and neighbors to read, the campesinos taught them skills for living in the mountains and the countryside—something that they had never experienced in their urban lives. Many brigadistas even called their host parents “mother” and “father.” In the communities, too, teachers and learners worked in solidarity with one another, completing development projects such as the construction of toilets in villages without adequate sanitation.

Most volunteers were well-off, and did not know what it meant to be poor in Nicaragua before they lived with the campesinos; but then they began to understand. Father Cardenal explains that, “they were transformed in solidarity. They began to worry about the people of their country, about the future of their country.” These grassroots literacy efforts were life-changing for the 60,000 volunteers in the mountains and 40,000 volunteers in the barrios on the outskirts of cities who gave five months to the cause of education in Nicaragua during the National Literacy Crusades. They learned the meaning of solidarity, came to understand the complex social justice issues that their country faced, and were immersed in a reality different from their own. The children of the literacy brigadistas are around the same age that their parents were when they went into the mountains and now make up Nicaragua’s university student population. These young adults grew up with the legacy of the literacy campaigns, visiting their campesino grandparents and hearing the stories of the brigadistas.

The UCA itself kept students deeply engaged in social justice issues before and during the Sandinista revolution through the Juan XXIII Institute for Social Action. Named after Pope John XXIII and often simply called “Juan XXIII,” the Juan XXIII Institute for Social Action was founded at the UCA in 1961. While the institute does not now directly engage students at the UCA, students were heavily involved in the institute’s research and social action programs throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. In its first 25 years, the institute mainly served as a means for UCA students to experience and understand Nicaragua’s realities of poverty, inequality, and marginalization. According to Edwin Novoa Martinez, the current director of the Juan XXIII Institute, students at the UCA from the 1960s to the early 1980s could “achieve committed immersion in this reality, in such a way that, at the end of their studies, they had had this experience and would be more sensitive and committed to the changes that the country needs—a country with many difficulties with social justice” through the institute. In the mid-1980s, however, the Sandinista revolution led to a change in the Juan XXIII Institute’s approach to development in Nicaragua. The directors of the institute decided to focus their work on the families who were displaced by the post-revolution armed conflict, who were in the greatest need. The institute played a leading role in supporting displaced families, and contributed much to Nicaragua’s human development at this time. Over time, students were able to participate in these efforts less and less frequently. The programs of the Juan XXIII Institute were far from the university—too far for a day or even a weekend service trip. Additionally, those areas became more dangerous as the conflict persisted. UCA students still participated in service as the Sandinistas came to power, but they served locally as volunteers cutting coffee or cotton to raise the nation’s production, or through the national literacy campaigns.

As Nicaragua changed regimes again in 1990 and President Chamorro implemented a neo-liberal model of development in the country, campesinos lost the land, union organization, and productive resources that had been available to them under the socialist Sandinista regime. The revolution had been unable to secure dignity for all poor people in Nicaragua, as it had promised. Any gains that had been made by the “dysfunctional, paternalistic state” created by the Sandinistas, Novoa explains, were no longer there to support rural farmers under the Chamorro regime. Thus, the Juan XXIII Institute changed its strategy to fill this gap in development. As it began to work more intensively and directly with communities in a model of sustainable development, and as the Nicaraguan government’s policies became more conservative, student participation in the institute’s programs fell completely away. Similar to its earlier years, the Juan XXIII Institute today aims to bring affordable housing, development, and health to poor communities in Nicaragua through social action that enables the most vulnerable sectors of the population to create social justice for themselves. Its housing and health initiatives have reached 400,000 people, and have contributed to sustainable development in Nicaragua. In its efforts to meet the needs of the most vulnerable populations in Nicaragua, however, it no longer includes students.

The value of solidarity was an important part of the years that
students and other youth were engaged in the improvement of the conditions of Nicaragua’s poor. Young people like the students at the UCA participated in the Literacy Crusades and the programs of the Juan XXIII Institute because they felt a unity with fellow Nicaraguans, regardless of their backgrounds. They were similarly motivated to support the Sandinista revolution: they believed that it was possible to make Nicaragua a better place to live, where Nicaraguans were free and their rights were respected. Does this rhetoric of solidarity hold meaning for Nicaraguan youth today?

**TODAY AT THE UCA: YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Current students at the UCA are not as involved as their parents were in service, solidarity, and ending injustice. Father Cardenal thinks that it is because their parents became disillusioned with the vision of the Sandinistas as the Sandinista regime itself failed to meet the needs of the people. Other interviewees suggest it is because students at the UCA are more privileged, and therefore disinterested. Others believe that it is not an issue specifically affecting students at the UCA, but that more Nicaraguan youth in general live comfortably and are therefore more apathetic toward the issues that their country faces. This, and more, was evidenced in a study conducted by Jorge Guerra and other sociology students: “When you ask about the values of the UCA, students often respond saying that they do not even know… There has been a review of the institution; now, students do not criticize, because they are a little bit indifferent, a little bit apathetic. The students are also afraid, because many of them are on scholarship—60 percent are on scholarship—and when it comes to making a polite critique of the university, they do not feel that they have the right to do so.”

For Father Cardenal, Nicaraguan young people are experiencing a crisis, because they are no longer involved in politics. Their parents were disillusioned by the corruption of the Sandinista government, the deaths caused by the revolution, and the failure of the Sandinista regime. Around 2009, Father Cardenal was in Spain for a speaking engagement, and he was asked, “How do you keep hope with the political disillusion [that has developed in Nicaragua] during the last few years?” He responded: “I thought about this idea. This idea is very tangible. And the youth give me hope. I have worked with the youth. Before the crusade, when there was so much fighting against Somocismo, I saw strength in the youth, a capacity of love and heroism. So I said one sentence: I hope that the youth return to the streets to make history…When I returned to Managua, there was so much traffic. Somebody was preparing a campaign and had put up propaganda on a billboard. But someone had taken black spray paint and written over it, ‘I hope that the youth return to the streets to make history.’”

Some youth responded to Father Cardenal’s call for youth involvement. Some benefited from their parents’ participation in the literacy campaigns and thus were taught that a strong commitment to solidarity and social justice is important. Interviewed Jesuits and professors at the UCA, however, see the response of students to social justice issues as underwhelming.

Professors like Father Cesar Sosa, S.J., a Jesuit priest who teaches philosophy at the UCA, cite a lack of interest in social justice, rather than disillusionment, as a factor that keeps students from engaging in social justice work. University students grow up more comfortable and more distanced from issues such as poverty and inequality. When the social service curriculum component (discussed later) was introduced to all majors at the UCA, there were students who opposed learning through service-learning courses. “We pay for professors to give classes. We do not pay to be sent into the streets with the poor,” a group of students told the social service program coordinator, Gaston Ortega. However, Professor Ruth Orozco, who teaches accounting, noticed the opposite trend in student involvement in her department: her students are more empathetic to the needs of the poor. This is because the accounting students come from similar backgrounds as those that they serve for their class projects. “This major has the most students with scholarships in the UCA,” Professor Orozco explained. “They are sensitive toward poverty.”

**SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE UNIVERSITY**

Whether it is because students are disillusioned or apathetic toward injustice, there is a perceived lack of discourse and activity around social justice and solidarity among the student body. Few students are motivated to dedicate time to social service on their own. Partially in response to this lack of motivation, the university created the social service program in 2013, adding several required service-learning courses to all undergraduate major curricula. This, and many other initiatives of the UCA, is driven by AUSJAL’s Social Responsibility Policy, which calls on each of its member Jesuit universities to respond to social problems in the context of its Ignatian identity. The policy is inspired by the radical affirmation of human dignity by Jesus of Nazareth. Through solidarity, AUSJAL member universities are expected to help students and communities learn how political power, economic resources, and knowledge must be used to support human dignity and transform Latin American societies.
El seis por ciento is another reason that the social responsibility of the university is taken so seriously. El seis por ciento is a controversial budget allocation that sends six percent of the national budget to universities—almost half of the 13 percent of the total national budget that goes to education. The UCA receives a part of this budget allocation. In a country where only about 17 percent of students continued their learning in higher education in 2012, a common sentiment is that universities have a duty to society if they receive such a large portion of the education budget. Father Sosa asserts that this is where a university’s social responsibility is derived. Jorge Ernesto Guerra, a sociology student, disagrees; he regards el seis por ciento as a social right to students, and does not factor in to the UCA’s duty to society. Faculty members like Father Sosa and Gaston Ortega see the social responsibility of the UCA as a fundamental duty to educate students to serve others and respond to the needs of their country. Several programs at the UCA take the different justifications for a policy of social responsibility into account in various ways.

SOCIAL SERVICE

Servicio social, or social service, is part of the curriculum for all undergraduate students at the UCA. Tailored to the needs of each of the UCA’s 19 majors, social service is implemented in several courses through a student’s degree in which the professor teaches through service-learning methodologies. Service-learning integrates learning about the required concepts for a student’s professional field with serving marginalized local communities. Students engage with social injustices in the field in which they are studying, then learn about and discuss them in class. According to Ortega, the program “is an expression of the university’s social responsibility.” As the coordinator of the program, he aims to immerse students in the problems of their country during their experience of “academic
Social service is implemented differently in each degree program; for example, architecture majors take courses about urban spaces, urban planning, and housing in Nicaragua. Beyond the university gates, students in the urban planning class propose realistic, cost-effective ways to transform small city spaces. They interact with community members in poor barrios and municipal officials through interviews, surveys, and meetings to create a feasible project for the city. In the classroom, students learn from community members who are invited to speak to students about the challenges in their communities, and students engage in class discussions to offer advice to and share their experiences with one another.

Accounting students experience social service through the private sector. Students complete their social service through courses called Research Techniques, Accounting of Costs I, and Cost Systems I. Groups of students are paired with a PYME in a poor area. Students provide accounting services to these businesses and learn every facet of how the business operates and how much it costs to make a product. Their work empowers the businesses to make better financial decisions and helps the students learn to apply theories they learn in class to real situations. The accounting program also invites the businesses to several events at the university. Last year, it hosted a product fair where community partners brought the products that students had learned how to produce and sell, and people from all parts of the UCA attended and purchased their products. At the end of the semester, the program invited students in service-learning classes, their professors, and the business-owners to a closing ceremony. All students received certificates of participation, and professors received certificates for teaching a service-learning course. The businesses also received “service received” certificates to include in applications for financial grants. The most outstanding and collaborative group of students also received an award. These events recognized the importance of social learning and its benefits for both students and small businesses in poor areas.

For philosophy students, the social service curriculum includes teaching high school students about philosophy on Monday mornings. Students are challenged to make learning about abstract theories accessible and enjoyable to teenagers at public schools run by Fe y Alegría. They meet in class to reflect on the content of their teaching and how their service contributed to their personal formation. Students learn about pedagogy, synthesis, and societal transformation.

According to Father Cesar Sosa, S.J., a philosophy professor who teaches social service courses for philosophy students, new horizons open for students as they experience backgrounds different from their own, albeit only for a few hours a week. Gaston Ortega agrees; he hopes that social service and service-learning make all students more sensitive to the problems faced by Nicaragua’s most vulnerable areas. Students themselves have varying views about the social service curriculum. Some students did not credit it with having an impact beyond their coursework, on their personal formation, as their professors hoped. Three accounting students who were interviewed did not believe that it affected their development as Nicaraguan citizens; they considered their service important for understanding social problems and completing class assignments, but not as something that would continue to affect them beyond their service-learning course. Others students saw social service as a way to improve and practice the skills that they learn in the classroom for their careers in their field of study. All of the students who were interviewed could agree, however, that service-learning is a way of helping and understanding those who are disadvantaged in Nicaraguan society—the primary goal of the social service program.

**Youth Researchers**

Jóvenes Investigadores, or “Youth Researchers,” is a research program that involves one-hundred students from the UCA from different majors. The program has been implemented in several service-learning courses at the UCA that are part of the social service curriculum, but students can also participate in the program as an extra-curricular activity. Youth Researchers introduces students to social justice and human rights issues that are related to the environment, especially the way impoverished recicladores, or “waste pickers,” experience the current waste and recycling system in Nicaragua. Students investigate the socio-economic and health conditions of recicladores as part of an initiative with NGOs, government organizations, and the
Network of Nicaraguan Recycling Entrepreneurs (REDNICA) to design programs and projects that strengthen the social and productive sectors of poor communities. Students are engaged throughout the research process in crucial roles as researchers. According to the founder of Youth Researchers, Professor Martha Rizos, and Faculty Coordinator Professor Kathy Murrillos, most of Nicaragua’s research about recycling has been quantitative; but Youth Researchers “looks for the personal part” of recycling by talking to the people who are actually living the process for qualitative research results. Students’ research is based around the question, “How do we create an inclusive recycling system in Nicaragua?”

Similar to social service, Youth Researchers enhances students’ professional development, develops their research skills, teaches them about the environment; but it does much more. As Professor Murillos offers, “It changes their views on reality…when we are having a meeting about it, they talk about the problems in our country and how they are living the experience. It changes their lives.” Joseling Murillo, a marketing student and the student coordinator of Youth Researchers, agrees; the program allows her to put into practice what she has learned in the classroom, but she says, “It is not just forming our education in a theoretical way…we become conscious of the situation. As marketing students, we have the most contact with people, so we learn about how we must relate to people and see how to fulfill their needs.” Youth Researchers in particular helps students learn research methods such as surveys and interviews that they can apply to their academics and professional lives. The program has also helped Murillo learn about social justice; in particular, it has given her a concern for the rights of the recicladores and the importance of people understanding their own human rights. The program is another way for students to engage in social justice and see different realities of life in Nicaragua.

**Campus Ministry**

La Pastoral Universitaria, or the UCA’s Office of Campus Ministry, offers students many options to get involved in social justice on and off campus. Service opportunities at campus ministry are ways for students to learn without grades. Some programs may prepare students for their professional lives when they work with populations similar to those that they serve, and all of the programs are ways for students to see the “social reality” of Nicaragua. Campus ministry has nine programs, most of which run on a weekly basis. Many of the volunteer opportunities involve providing accompaniment and educational activities to vulnerable groups in Managua, such as children with disabilities, incarcerated men and women, street children, children from low-income families who live near the UCA or whose parents are employed by the UCA, at-risk girls at a nearby high school, and children with serious illnesses. Campus ministry also has an environmental group for students, Voluntariado Ambiente, for students interested in teaching their peers about environmental issues. Interested students meet weekly to plan educational events such as recycling campaigns and designing a university vegetable garden.

**Jesuit Service for Migrants**

El Servicio Jesuita para Migrantes, or the Jesuit Service for Migrants, conducts research and social analysis about migrant populations in Central America and offers legal help and socio-pastoral counseling to migrants and their families. Their Documentos sin fronteras (Documents without Borders) project processes the migration documents for Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica in partnership with the Jesuit Service for Migrants in Costa Rica. The Nicaraguan office for Jesuit Service for Migrants is on the campus of the UCA, where students may intern for the organization. They learn how to perform community assessments and interpret the results, conduct structured interviews of families of migrants who remain in Nicaragua and community leaders, and immerse themselves in the issue of migration on the community level.

**THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TODAY**

Students are less politically involved today at the UCA than they were in past years. This is, firstly, because no political
action is stemming from their class discussions. The university receives funding from the government, so several interviewees said that students feel discouraged from discussing politics in a critical manner in the classroom; but it was unclear by whom. Father Sosa noted that discussing his political opinions in class could cause him and his students problems. According to Jorge Guerra, some students who receive scholarships also do not understand that they are still allowed to politically critique the university and the government. These limits stunt the potential that social analysis and discussion have to affect students’ actions on politics and social justice beyond the classroom. Due to the political nature of social justice issues such as housing and education in Nicaragua’s Sandinista government, students’ ability to discuss politics seems connected to their understanding of the challenges faced by marginalized communities in their country.

These limits on dialogue in and about education are reflected in other places as well, not only in class. The minister of education herself, Miriam Raudez, struggles to maintain transparency. She does not give press conferences, and educational experts find it difficult to contact her. Anything that the Nicaraguan people know about the Ministry of Education is from the fifteen-minute speeches that Rosario Murillos, the wife of current President Daniel Ortega, gives each day. The Ministry of Education does not prioritize teaching students to think critically about the world around them.

Yet another factor limits student discussion about politics: the UCA itself. On October 28, 2008, students from the National Union of Nicaraguan Students (UNEN), a Sandinista student organization, and opposing UCA students clashed violently in protests at the UCA. UNEN members entered the Faculty of Law and assaulted several students in the classroom who did not agree with changing the leadership of UNEN, causing the building to be evacuated and the injury of three students. Classes were closed for the day. However, the eventual re-election of César Perez, the current president of UNEN, sparked further violence at the UCA in December of the same year. Dissenting student leaders of the UNEN protested Perez’s re-election on December 11; as they saw it, the 40-year old was no longer able to represent the interests of the students.
They also were angry about corruption in UNEN’s congress. In order to prevent further violence, the university implemented heightened security measures at their gates: only people with university identification cards were able to enter.\textsuperscript{48} These security measures were still in place in August 2014. To counter the UCA’s response, UNEN leaders called for the suspension of the UCA’s sei\textsuperscript{s} por ciento grant\textsuperscript{49}, prompting the rectors of other universities to declare their support for the UCA and its right to continue receiving government funding.\textsuperscript{50} (As mentioned earlier, el sei\textsuperscript{s} por ciento is a controversial budget allocation that sends six percent of the national budget, or nearly half of Nicaragua’s total budget for education, to institutes of higher learning\textsuperscript{51}).

After these events, the UCA also limited the activities of political organizations on campus. To protect the safety of its students, the UCA’s administration prevents engagement in political activities that may turn violent. This has stifled more than violent voices, however: students were still largely uninvolved in the decision-making process about how to use the funds from el sei\textsuperscript{s} por ciento in 2014, despite the fact that the budget allocation played a large role in the protests. Students sometimes make efforts to create politically informed organizations, but these efforts are met with difficulty. Because of this, according to sociology student Jorge Ernesto Guerra, “there are no active, dynamic, independent organizations that are going to propose that students participate in the decisions about the management of public resources. What is more, there is a block on this.” These limits create yet another obstacle for dialogue on campus about politics and broader social justice issues.

Finally, the rhetoric of solidarity in Nicaragua seems to have evolved. While it was taken to heart during the National Literacy Crusades, it may have new significance for Nicaraguans today, especially those who do not identify with the actions and aims of the Sandinista Party. In public city spaces and highways, one can find billboards and even park benches with the slogan of Sandinista President Daniel Ortega’s third term: “Nicaragua Cristiana Socialista Solidaria!”\textsuperscript{52} For Nicaraguans who do not support the current government, perhaps solidarity no longer has the positive connotations it had in the 1980s when the Sandinista revolution seemed as if it could indeed guarantee dignity and basic human rights for all Nicaraguans.

It is difficult to talk about social justice without talking about politics, and vice versa. Interviewed professors were worried both about students being discouraged from discussing the political situation in Nicaragua and about how well the UCA is forming students into professionals with a social conscience. If students feel unwelcome to discuss politics, it is not likely that they will enthusiastically engage in dialogue about the social justice issues that relate to politics. Students may feel committed to service, but if they are not discussing and understanding the issues on a more structurally complex level, they will not be equipped to work towards transforming the injustices they encounter as they work in disadvantaged communities. Daunting problems like inadequate housing, poor sanitation, low standards of education, and other poverties faced by disadvantaged rural and urban communities in Nicaragua will not be approached by young people who do not feel confident in their abilities to understand the issues beyond tragic statistics. It is clear from the factors that prevent political discourse on campus that apathy is not the only thing inhibiting student engagement in social justice.

DO STUDENTS AT THE UCA THINK CRITICALLY ABOUT THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN SOCIAL JUSTICE?

Eight students were formally interviewed for this project, and they were asked one or more of the following questions to demonstrate the ways that they think about social justice: One buzzword that the university uses is the “social responsibility of the university.” What does social responsibility mean to you? Do you think that the social responsibility of the university is connected to social justice? How do you define social justice? How does the program [that you are involved in] affect your development or identity as a Nicaraguan citizen?

Their responses varied in complexity and detail. Most students were not very familiar with the academic discourse around the concept of social justice, but they were able to offer their own informal, thoughtful definition relating to their own social justice work. For example, architecture student Harry Lopez Novoa broke down the phrase “social justice” into two parts: laws (justice) and societal issues such as poverty and indifference. He thought that an integrated approach to these two things could lead to equality, and that “doing something for others”—or, fulfilling one’s social responsibility—completed the idea of social justice.

Cynthia Rodriguez is an economics major who was not involved in social justice through the UCA but was involved in TECHO, a youth-led organization that collaborates with families living in poverty throughout Latin America and the Caribbean to overcome poverty in slums through housing projects.\textsuperscript{53} She was the only student who discussed solidarity in her interview. This may correspond to the fact that, in Nicaragua, TECHO is an organization that often attracts youth who are the children of brigadistas and other former youth volunteers from the national literacy campaigns. Its core values and approaches are
influenced by the experiences of the youth volunteers from the late 1980s, and students whose families participated in the campaigns of that time are familiar with those values, which have been passed on from parents to children.

While most of the students had considered how their service affected their future, the three accounting students who were interviewed together did not think that their experiences serving a PYME had anything to do with their identities as Nicaraguan citizens, although they did find the work important for their course. These three students saw themselves as representatives of the UCA in the context of the university’s social responsibility to the community that they were serving. On the other hand, another student who felt more strongly attached to the concept of social justice in relation to his service-learning explained that he did not think that the UCA was informing students about the social service program and the service-learning requirement enough. He wanted to see more details about the development of the program.

All of the students interviewed discussed how important it was to see “realities” other than their own. In fact, rather than talking about social “problems” or “challenges,” each of them used the term “reality” to discuss the experiences of people they served and their own experiences. All of the interviewed students recognized the importance of immersion in other ways of life to understand what it is like “in someone else’s shoes.” Joseling Murillo, the Youth Researchers student coordinator, explained that through her research about recicladores in rural areas, she began to view the realities of others in a different light: “It was a wonderful experience because we became conscious of the reality that many people live in. Sometimes we ignore the work that these people do, but we got to see how important they are, because they are people who are helping the environment in one way or another. This is also a form of survival for them.”

Herdy Bravo, a philosophy student at the UCA, believed this so strongly that he took a year off from classes at the UCA to teach philosophy and sociology at a high school in Chinandega, a rural, mountainous region. He saw it as a way to seriously learn about development issues without looking at people as statistics, and to experience what it is like to be a teacher. While he agreed that his unique service-learning experience is an important part of his education, he did not like the un-altruistic connotation of social responsibility: “I think that when you say “social responsibility”…you realize that you can do something, and that you are ethically obligated to. You have to learn and you have to move, because you are reading about the problem or seeing the problem in the news...[Social responsibility] is not discursive, it is not about talking about it; it has to be a personal experience. I do not like saying “responsibility” because it makes it sound guilty, like an ethical duty...It has implications of guilt. But to help because of guilt—I do not know how to say it; I guess it is not healthy.” Murillo saw social responsibility in a more positive light, but it was clear that she had also thought about it critically: “Social responsibility is to do [service] and to do it continually...If you are not doing it constantly, it is not social responsibility; it
is philanthropy…I believe that the university is truly fulfilling its social responsibility because it is continually carrying out its activities. Not only do they benefit; we benefit as students—and if we can, we make it benefit others as well.”

Students who voluntarily engaged in research and literature around the social justice issues that they were working in seemed to think more critically about their service. Jorge Guerra, for example, had clearly given the social problems that he encountered in his research at the Jesuit Service for Migrants deep analysis: “Migration, yes, it is a problem in this country. But it is not manifest; it is not evident either to other citizens, the government, or the public policies of this country. So [the internship] helps me to know a problem that I did not even know was a problem, and that is very much related to the economic situations that many inhabitants in this country are living in…Immigration is a collective problem; if we are going to be more global, be a generation of capitalism, and [continue] the tendency of accumulation of wealth and [the pattern] of central nations and periphery nations.”

Despite the fact that students did not discuss these social justice issues and the political challenges that were connected to them more intensely and critically in classroom settings, the interviewed students who were voluntarily involved in social justice thought more critically about the issues in which they were engaged. The students did not echo Father Sosa’s concerns about the lack of political classroom dialogue. Their responses seemed to reflect that formal dialogue about social justice is indeed lacking, but not informal discussions amongst classmates.

CONCLUSION

The UCA’s diverse social justice initiatives affect the education of its students in varying ways. The service-learning requirement gives students a new sense of what poverty means and a broader perspective about the social issues in Nicaragua. Other more intensive internships and research positions allow students to immerse themselves in a specific issue and develop skills that can be applied to both their service work and their field of study. This second kind of initiative, where students voluntarily engaged in social justice work, seemed to more consistently have a strong impact on students; with this in mind, it is important for the UCA to support the efforts of smaller programs to generate interest amongst students. A main challenge to these programs is the “crisis amongst young people” that Father Cardenal, Father Sosa and Jorge Guerra discussed: students are apathetic about social justice issues and feel discouraged from speaking about politics. A culture of student engagement might be fostered amongst students to reverse these issues. A university with students who are enthusiastic about engagement would encourage civil dialogue about social justice and related political issues in and outside of the classroom. With more events similar to the accounting and finance department’s end-of-social-service celebration and product fair, students could be welcomed to share their social justice work and reach a wider audience within the university. With the social service program, the UCA is on a path toward fostering this dialogue in the classroom, at the very least.

At the time of writing, the social service program is still only about a year old. As the program gets older, it will be useful to create evaluation methods such as surveys of community members, students, and professors to see if it is influencing students’ understanding of social justice concepts and their post-graduation plans. It is also important to take extra steps to ensure that students are stepping out of their comfort zones and learning. With all students taking classes for this compulsory curriculum, it is inevitable that some will require an extra push to engage with the issues and remain open to new ideas. One way to approach this challenge is through reflection and discussion in class inspired by Ignatian spirituality. It seemed that some departments succeeded in including this reflective element, while others did not. The shape the UCA’s service-learning curriculum takes over the next few years, and its impact on students, could be a source of discussion for Jesuit universities, such as Georgetown, with growing social justice pedagogy programs.
EDWIN NOVOA MARTÍNEZ, DIRECTOR OF THE JUAN XXIII INSTITUTO DE ACCIÓN SOCIAL EN MANAGUA, NICARAGUA

[Regarding the dynamic of change in the 1980s]

In the 1980s, with the victory of the Sandinista Revolution, in the country and the university, we placed ourselves in a new dynamic of change. In the mid-1980s, the directors of the Juan XXIII Institute were thinking about the call of the Society of Jesus and that all their work was where others were not and where the need for justice was much greater. [The main issues in these years were] where the most needy were and where the greatest vulnerabilities of these families were. They were working in the middle of rural Nicaragua, where the armed conflict was.

GASTÓN ORTEGA, COORDINATOR OF SERVICIO SOCIAL, UNIVERSIDAD CENTROAMERICANA, MANAGUA, NICARAGUA

How do you define social justice?

My idea of social justice is contributing to something to create less social injustice because, in reality, social justice is a utopia. It is an ideal that we want to build in countries like Nicaragua, countries in development where there is much social, cultural, economic, and moral inequality.

…But we must criticize a system that produces injustice. Injustices are not natural. Injustices are products of a system and a way in which people are organized—and not only people in Nicaragua but all people in the world. There are social classes that are more affluent, more powerful; there are countries that are more powerful than others. It is very unjust that these powerful people use resources that are for the common good for their own benefit…Injustice has to do with the way power is used.

JORGE ERNESTO GUERRA, SOCIOLOGY STUDENT AND INTERN AT THE SERVICIO JESUITA PARA MIGRANTES AT THE UNIVERSIDAD CENTROAMERICANA IN MANAGUA, NICARAGUA

How does your involvement in social justice affect your development as a Nicaraguan citizen?

It affects me in the sense that I realize things that are not clearly shown in reality. Migration, yes, it is a problem in this country. But it is not manifest, it is not evident either to other citizens, the government, or the public policies of this country. So it helps me to know a problem that I did not even know was a problem, and that is very much related to the economic situations that many inhabitants in this country are living in.

JOSELING MURILLO LÓPEZ, MARKETING STUDENT AND COORDINATOR OF THE JÓVENES INVESTIGADORES PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSIDAD CENTROAMERICANA IN MANAGUA, NICARAGUA

There is a buzzword that the university often uses, “the social responsibility of the university.” What do you believe is the social responsibility of the UCA?

For me the social responsibility of the university is in students supporting [society] in their extracurricular activities that are in the university, but not only a single time because social responsibility is to do it and to do it continually…If you aren’t doing it constantly, it is not social responsibility; it is philanthropy. If you are doing social responsibility, you are doing it constantly…I believe that the university is truly fulfilling its social responsibility because it is continually carrying out its activities. Not only do they benefit; we benefit as students—and if we can, we make it benefit others as well.

FATHER JULIO CÉSAR SOSA GÓNZÁLEZ, S.J., PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY AND SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE UNIVERSIDAD CENTROAMERICANA IN MANAGUA, NICARAGUA

At Georgetown, I have noticed that the Jesuit mission is very present in our classes, especially in philosophy and theology. As a professor at the UCA, what impact has the Jesuit mission had in your philosophy classes?

Well, I am Jesuit, so I try to orient the class and the syllabus…
[so that] academia is a way to serve others. Your studies are not finished unless they are a way of serving others, especially the most poor. So the readings that I choose for Social Philosophy, for example, the dynamic that makes the class participate to share their political opinion, the methodology in class of respecting the opinions of others—all of this is very marked by what we consider to be the mission of the Society [of Jesus], which is to serve others, especially the most poor.

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

**Professor Kathy Murillo Acuña and Professor Marta Rizo de Torres**  
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**Herdy Bravo**  
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**Father Fernando Cardenal, S.J.**  
National Director, Fe y Alegría

**Dr. Rafael Lucio Gil**  
Academic Coordinator, Xabier Gorostiaga, S.J. Education Institute

**Father Julio César Sosa González, S.J.**  
Professor of Philosophy and Secretary of the Board of Directors, Universidad Centroamericana

**Jorge Ernesto Guerra**  
Sociology Student and Intern, Servicio Jesuita para Migrantes at the Universidad Centroamericana

**Joseling Murillo López**  
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**Edwin Novoa Martínez**  
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**Juan Francisco Gutiérrez Medina**  
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**Gastón Ortega**  
Coordinator of Servicio Social, Universidad Centroamericana

**Alberto Solórzano**  
Architect and Professor, Universidad Centroamericana

**Cristel Quiroz**  
Architect, TECHO Volunteer and former student at the Universidad Centroamericana


iv. Ibid.


xi. Zia-Us-Sabur and Manzoor Ahmed. “Multiple Providers and Access to Primary Education.”

xii. Caritas deliberately calls them centers not schools because they don’t have the same infrastructure to be classified as a school. They are usually single room buildings that have one or two teachers and employ a multi-grade approach.


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liii. UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Country profiles: Nicara-
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