

#### TOWARDS TOMORROW

the life of our charism being communicated and lived out. Then, as time went on, I became aware of an increasing desire for a deeper and broader spiritual formation. This was clearly indicated in 1990 when we were revising the Goals and Criteria. From across the country came changes in wording expressing an important shift towards the adults in each Sacred Heart school community; the adults were living and modelling the values of the Goals, rather than simply expecting the students to do so. In the light of this call to adult formation, it is clear that Madeleine Sophie's legacy to us is one of a healthy, large view of God, God who is love. As we approach the twenty-first century, I believe that we rscj are called to play an even stronger role in partnership with our lay colleagues in the area of serious spiritual formation. We need to have more faith in the gifts we have for all those who are searching for meaning at this time.

Communicating by means of 'the net' soon spread to Provinces beyond the United States; it became a valuable tool by which to spread the experience and expertise in Popular Education, a project that was gradually being developed in the Provinces of Latin America, most notably in Mexico. As a result of the interaction made possible by the net, these provinces have been able to exchange views, conduct a common search, prepare for meetings and finally draw up a document on some of the basic elements of Popular Education in Latin America. The first meeting was held in Colombia in 1984; this was followed by Peru in 1986; three years later delegates involved in Popular Education met in Venezuela, then in Chile and in Mexico in 1996. In 1998 delegates travelled beyond Latin America to Spain. Describing this meeting, Socorro Martínez rscj said, 'Something new was being born and was beginning to take root. We could feel it, touch it...' So the internet provided the means to publish insights and new developments in Popular Education among all the Provinces of Latin America.

However, networking has not been confined to Popular Education. The net has provided a tool whereby the Society has

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taken full responsibility for formal education and has been able to share it with the laity. In Mexico, for example, informal networking began in 1991 with students from all the colleges meeting for sports and cultural events. The vision was widened four years later when Mexico played host to a Workshop on Formal Education which was attended by religious and lay staff from the Provinces of South America and the United States. There a decision was taken to work on a new edition of 'The Plan of Studies'. A working document was drawn up in 1998 at a second workshop held at Lima. The aim was to produce a book entitled *The Spirit of Education in the Sacred Heart* which could be presented to the Society as a bicentenary gift.

Many rscj were inspired by the possibilities that were opening up as a result of technological advance; Catherine (Kit) Collins rscj was among the first to understand the potential offered by the net as a tool for mission. She has described her ministry at the Center for Educational Design and Communication.

#### *The work of the Center for Design and Communication*

CEDC was founded in the recognition that education is not bounded by classrooms, that communication is a matter of relationship and communion, and that the call to work for social justice is integral to our faith.

At CEDC we are in the active ministry of putting communication at the service of social justice – of doing what we do from a profoundly educative perspective. We are in partnership with under-resourced groups that are working for social change – people of passion and commitment, who share something of our vision. They press for educational transformation as integral to systematic change, and they use the media as an agent of liberation that gives voice, visibility and power to those who have been denied the means to communicate. We approach our project partnerships with the

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belief that 'media' is not about products, but about the thoughtful creation of effective and caring relationships. We try to reflect in all that we do the deepest meaning of our oft-repeated phrase, 'Social Justice: It Happens By Design'. Through our work we have been in contact with countless groups and individuals; we cannot possibly list all that we do, but we can attempt to give the flavour of our ministry.

We are involved in a whole clutch of projects which touch the lives of people who are victims of economic injustice, poor women, homeless people and those working against incredible odds to challenge the prevailing system. We have concrete commitments to those dispossessed, denied their rights, forced to leave their home and country. We are constantly working on projects with groups striving for better information and for educational transformation. They are using electronic communications to build active relationships among communities which have united against the tyranny of local and global control and exploitation.

CEDC has also been involved with grass-root women's groups struggling to overcome the oppression of women. Working in partnership with them, we have produced materials for the women's groups which were attempting to shape the agenda of the United Nations' 'Conference on Women' in Beijing in 1995. We have also provided material to facilitate a six-point Women's Action Agenda to effect and concretise the outcomes of the Beijing Conference.

We have developed electronic communication to support groups seeking to confront and reverse the impact of the Bretton Woods Conference on the poorest countries of the world and those actively working against the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the World Bank and the IMF. In 1999 the effect of these efforts were just beginning to emerge.

We have also become actively involved in such local schemes as a pilot project embracing four community-based organisations in low-income areas of Washington, DC. We also support Networked Learning Centers together with an out-of-

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school programme for 6-13-year-old children in the neighbourhood; for the most part these are children who have been assigned to the worst city schools. Currently (in 1999) we are collaborating in the development of an inquiry-based project-learning curriculum, and we are also developing a professional staff programme for young teachers who lack training and support.

Another important area of our mission is that of designing and implementing web sites to create on-line communities for those promoting social change through solidarity and joint action. We have, for example, created a web site for the social justice community ([www.justicenet.org](http://www.justicenet.org)) and another web site for the Washington DC Housing Network ([www.justicenet.org/headinghome](http://www.justicenet.org/headinghome)). These web sites provide information, discussion forums, and a visible 'Action Alert' on immediate local and world crises such as the 1999 tragic situation in East Timor. The site also provides e-mail links to all members of US Government at state and national levels, to national and local media and to the United Nations.

We also produce videos; *One Child at a Time* depicts an inspirational after-school programme for children in the West Grove, one of South Miami's poorest areas. Its aim was to inform parents of the project and to educate the broader public about the problems of these children; we also hoped that the video might be a means of gaining financial support.

These projects have been undertaken alongside our ongoing commitment to support our own Province and indeed the whole Society. To this end we have produced several publications, many in several languages, and assisted in the production of a video of the 1994 General Chapter. For our own Province we have set up a Web Site ([www.rscj.org](http://www.rscj.org)) and ensured that all communities had Internet access and the use of e-mail.

Although the development of Information Technology (IT) has a potential for serious harm, especially in the matters of globalisation or the transference of huge untaxed sums around the globe, it has become clear that technology is a tool, neutral

in itself, which takes on the value and power of the user's hand and intent. We believe that we, as a Society of educators committed to solidarity with the poor, cannot be merely observers and bystanders. We are impelled to make a genuine effort to harness the potential of IT in the service of the world community, of social justice and the marginalised. Unless people of faith and commitment become engaged in this revolutionary means of communication, it will take an unimaginable toll, creating ever greater margins of poverty across the globe. That is why, modest though our efforts are, we work to transform the use of this technology to the service of good. Our greatest privilege and blessing is that we work with and offer hospitality to so many people, who by the vitality of their faith and their compassionate energy, penetrate the darkness, and plant hope squarely in the midst of despair and injustice. To be in partnership with such persons is a precious gift for which we are always grateful.

### *Associate Members (AscJ) and Volunteers*

At the General Chapter of 1994, the capitulants declared, 'We have the deep conviction that our spirituality does not belong to us alone. It is a gift to be shared, a treasure others help us to discover.' In keeping with this conviction was the recommendation that the movement for Associate Members be encouraged. In 1999 Associate groups had been flourishing in some Provinces for several years; in others they were in the process of forming. Just as there was pluriformity among rscJ, so there was among the community groupings of associates, for a deliberate effort had been made to respond to the desires of the would-be Associates, rather than to impose a central blueprint.

The individuals concerned were united by the common desire to renew and deepen their baptismal vows by living the spirituality of the Society. All made a commitment to this effect by an

act of consecration, which followed a period of initiation. The practicalities of how this was to be fulfilled were left to each group under the guidance of an accompanying rscJ.

Thus by 1999, the situation regarding Associates varied from place to place; in Puerto Rico, for example, there were thirty or more Associates in six separate community groupings. In England and Malta, on the other hand, the development was more recent and their formation was still in process. Young and old, married or single, former students, friends and colleagues were drawn to these groups. Their driving force seemed to be a desire to strengthen their active faith and to become formally linked to the Society. For most Associate members their style of life continue unchanged, but there were exceptions. In Austria, for example, Biane Schribl ascJ, a trained nurse, was living in community with two rscJ and worked virtually full-time in the convent infirmary, caring for the elderly sisters. Marianne Keevins, ascJ from Boston, USA, was similarly involved in a ministry with the Society. Marianne, supported by the Boston Associates and the United States Province, was responsible for establishing the Barat Spirituality Centre on Cape Cod.

Several Associates from Austria, Malta, Puerto Rico and Spain have generously contributed information; without exception they expressed appreciation for the support they were receiving from each other and from the Society. Carmen B. Trigo de Villetto ascJ, a Puerto Rican grandmother, wrote of 'a community of faith, of solidarity in joy and sadness, of serene dialogues in all circumstances, even in crisis'. Another said, 'I receive a great deal of spiritual support which has sustained me through the loneliness of being a widow and the trials of living with my youngest son, who is an alcoholic.' Finally Josefina Franca de Quirch, also from Puerto Rico, explained that

being an ascJ has made me realise that we have to walk together as a community; we have to strive for compassion and try to know and love Jesus. It is not really a change in our lives, more