



Embracing Our Neighbors: The Katrina Relief Work Team

By Freddie Bunge

As FCCB Minister for Campus Life, Shelly Dieterle focuses her leadership gifts on one mission. She wants to build strong ties between Cal students and members of the congregation.

The Campus Ministry began with a Mentorship Project, now moving into its third offering. Church members, matched with students in a one-on-one pairing, learn from each other.

More recently, the thrust has been on community-building. A Katrina Relief Work



Team headed for New Orleans in late March 2006. It included nine students and eleven FCCB members. For a week they worked with a UCC church on rehabilitation projects in the devastated Gentilly Parish, bonding as a group while they wielded hammers, planted flowers. For Shelly, “the experience confirmed the value of an intentional community” that fostered ties between members of the congregation and students on the neighboring campus. Those who went on the trip agree 100 percent. Though mixed in age, ethnic origin, and spiritual practice, by week’s end they had come together as one.

In their words:

“My real hesitation was going with the group. I’m just often not a very good group member. But it was so much fun getting to

know people that I find myself now wanting to go to church just to see people from our group.

“I really wasn’t sure I wanted to do it. But then, I heard some of the other students discussing it and thought ‘at least now I have

some faces to talk to.’ That gave me community, and I decided to go. On the trip, I felt I really got to make friends. I mean really *be* friends, not just have a good time together. Especially some of the older people, with more years than I. Both sides could give to each other.”

A positive experience with Mentorship inspired some students to join the Relief Team.

“I don’t attend the church. But I know Shelly through the membership program. So when she told me she was organizing the trip, I was really interested. Because I’ve really gotten a lot from the Mentorship program.”

“I know Shelly from several Campus Ministry programs. She’s a good leader. Not so much about authority as she is about dialogue. She and the others, they didn’t, like, exercise super control, and that way they could keep the group from flying to pieces.

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One in a series of longer articles illuminating the life of FCCB. These stories will be attached to the email version of the Carillon, added to www.fccb.org, and will be available in print at the church.

Call the church office if you would like to receive the email version of the Carillon.

Intergenerational ties greatly enhanced the experience:

“It was very important that we were a diverse group. That was a very special part of the experience. Granted the 70-year-olds weren’t your average 70 year-olds. They were working circles around me. And they seemed to know what to do. With younger people, it takes a bit more time. We can’t, you know, dive right in.

“We had signed up as mentors; but with the students so busy, this experience, working with them side by side, proved to be the best way to really get to know them.

“About the students, I too was very impressed. Their spirit. Well, we all felt it.

“I really liked that it was diverse. Like in age, and not just students. It was extremely cool to get to know older people and how mature everyone was. Not a big divide. I never heard so many interesting stories. Usually in your conversations with [older people] you are in “adult mode”. But your attitude on this trip definitely changed. I respect older adults, but this was more of a friendship. I like that better.

Concerning the spiritual aspect:

“I think what was spiritual was being present to listen to stories. This was part of our work. ...We came from a lot of different faith traditions, but maybe it was the overarching feeling of caring...you know...the prime dictate of any religion.

“Possibly I’m more spiritual than some of the others in the group. My parents have a Buddhist altar in their home. But I thought ‘what counts is where our values overlap, and how we work together.’”

“It was absolutely important to be clear that there would be prayer and scripture reading.

It’s important to show what it means to be Christian, and to have an opportunity to reach people who might want more spiritual influence....Evenings out, we students talked about being young and Christian, and being gay and Christian, and just about anything. It was just a great group--prepared to do work in social justice.”



things I would like to find in myself.

“It was extremely meaningful to me. *I felt that, if nothing else, I learned a lot about myself. I learned what it means to be there for a stranger, to listen to someone’s story, and to really hear what they’re saying. To be not afraid of pain and suffering, to face it head on, with work gloves and an open heart.*

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Several team members summed up the life-changing difference this Campus Ministry project had made to them:

“I’ll carry the memory of this experience forever.

“I thought it was really cool to see adults and students both who were like funny, and cool, and concerned about things, conscious of what is going on, glad to help out. It’s important how all this interacts in some way that I might want to be later in my life, like how to compile all the