CAPACITAR—Women Planting One Heart
An International Network of Empowerment and Solidarity

Celebrating 10 Years of Commitment

This summer marks the 10th anniversary of CAPACITAR. So much has happened since 1988 when Sister Mary Hartman and Anabel Torres, founders of CANTERA, invited me to work on a folkloric festival in Nicaragua. To stay centered and peaceful during two nonstop weeks of work, I practiced Tai Chi and acupuncture. When my friends commented: “Your artwork is great, but when are you going to teach us how to do that?” I never dreamed that these words would change my own life, along with the lives of many others. The Nicaraguans also taught me the beautiful Spanish word “capacitar,” meaning to empower, to encourage, to bring forth. Thus began CAPACITAR with our mission to heal and empower ourselves as well as to heal and transform our communities. We wanted especially to commit ourselves to those areas of the world destroyed by weapons of war, violence and poverty, bringing instead, arms of compassion, love and healing.

So our dream has grown. During the past ten years CAPACITAR has offered more than 500 workshops to nearly 10,000 women and families in nine different countries. Over 100 U.S. women have participated in CAPACITAR Journeys to Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and China. CAPACITAR teams have coordinated Healing Tents and programs for the NGO World Forum on Women in China in 1995, and for the International Latin American Feminist Congresses in El Salvador and in Chile. CAPACITAR teams of trainers are working in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Chile, as well as in Cincinnati OH, St. Louis MO, Laredo TX, Denver CO, and in California. In February 98 our first Central American Regional CAPACITAR Conference brought together in El Salvador team participants from four countries. Our English and Spanish manuals are used by groups in the US, in Latin America and in Africa. There is interest in taking our training programs to Africa and the Mideast. Our workshops have built bridges of healing and understanding with people from diverse socioeconomic, educational and religious backgrounds, bringing together grassroots women, teachers, psychologists, social workers, nurses, doctors, holistic healers, religious, youth, union leaders, political activists, farmworkers, indigenous, community organizers, feminists and health promoters. Often the images of CAPACITAR are remarkable: Mayan women with babies on their backs practicing Tai Chi; inner-city children doing Pal Dan Gum; farmworkers holding acupuncture points to relieve pain and fatigue; teachers leading their students in guided visualization; ministers using Tai Chi movements for body prayer.

Through the years I have tried to understand why CAPACITAR has been so effective with such a diversity of people and cultures. One woman recently described the heart of our work: “All I have is my body, my self. I am learning daily to listen to the wisdom of my body and soul and to use the energy of my hands to heal and empower myself. And I am learning to reach out to others, to touch my children and my community with love and compassion, teaching them to likewise appreciate and use their own unique gift and potential.” The body/mind/spirit practices touch deeply the heart and soul, help us to let go of and transform the wounds of the past, and bring us back into balance with who we truly are—the simple, yet most challenging work of healing and transformation.

The 1998 issues of the newsletter will celebrate CAPACITAR’s ten years, and will look forward to new dreams and possibilities as we move into the new millennium. Thank you for your interest and support through the years.

—Pat Can, Founder/Executive Director, CAPACITAR

We join with the Earth and with each other with our ancestors and with all beings of the future to bring New Life to the land, to recreate the Human Community, to provide justice and peace, to remember our children, to remember who we are. We join together as many and diverse expressions of one loving mystery for the Healing of the Earth and the Renewal of all Life.

—CAPACITAR Prayer
Central American Conference

Maria Isabel Figueroa, former secretary to Archbishop Romero, went as she walked the labyrinth in the candle-lit room in Suchitoto, El Salvador. In walking the ritual circles with other Central American sisters, she found peace and healing from horrific memories of war and violence that have so deeply scarred the vast majority of her people. In February 1998, sixteen representatives from CAPACITAR teams in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and the U.S. met together for the first Central American Regional CAPACITAR Conference funded by Global Fund for Women. The conference focused on “healing the healer”—the formation and healing of teams involved in teaching CAPACITAR workshops to people deeply wounded by Central American wars and by current violence in their countries.

Each woman told her story in a rich interchange of compassionate listening and learning. Maria Isabel shared how it is a miracle that she is still alive, and she knows that her vocation is to be part of the healing process of El Salvador. Gladys Lanza described how the CAPACITAR workshop in Honduras three years ago changed her life. Gladys was the highest ranking woman union leader in Central America, until she was tortured, her home fire-bombed and her union destroyed. When she came to the workshop she discovered that she was a natural healer. For the past three years she has tirelessly offered healing sessions of polarity therapy to hundreds of Hondurans who have suffered from political violence. She is currently working with prisoners, helping the men to heal personal wounds and violent attitudes. Gladys, accustomed to years of political battle and confrontation with the military, now radiates grace and wisdom as she talks about the deep healing and transformation in her own life. She has learned how to be love and light with the wounded of her country and she wants to empower others to do that, too. Gladys served as an inspiring role model to Salvadoran participants who were just beginning their personal journeys of healing.

Barbara Saquén, Guatemalan woman from Patzún, described the past and current struggle of indigenous women. Several years ago Barbara founded Madre Tierra, and has helped Mayan women reclaim their culture, learn healing practices and understand their rights as women. With the support of Global Fund for Women, Madre Tierra has worked to empower several hundred Mayan women and their families from six different communities. Barbara was accompanied to the conference by her two-year-old daughter kani, who has been part of CAPACITAR gatherings since her birth. kani followed her mother with Tai Chi movements and walked the labyrinth with the community.

The Central American women were deeply moved when U.S. participants described their work with healing the lives of poor U.S. women and their families. Often Central Americans hold the stereotype that there is no poverty in the United States. Sister Mary Stanton RSM and Mercy Associate, Sue Kehman, described their work with poor inner-city women in Cincinnati. Mary is Founder and Executive Director of Bethany House, which works with homeless women. Sue is Founder and Director of Healing Connections, which brings healthcare to poor women and their families. Mary and Sue, who have been part of the CAPACITAR program in Cincinnati, planned a visit to El Roble, their sister community in El Salvador, to coincide with the conference.

Women from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and the U.S. walking the labyrinth at the First CAPACITAR Regional Conference in Central America

The regional conference was a grassroots gathering run by grassroots women. Joan Condon, CAPACITAR International Program Coordinator and Executive Director of IMRF, the International Medical Relief Fund, arranged to hold the conference in a Suchitoto meeting house owned by IMRF. Delicious meals for the conference were cooked by midwives of Asociación de Parteras Rosa Andrade de Gutierrez, providing employment and support for the women. Joan has worked with the midwives for the last five years training and empowering them in administrative and organizational skills. During the conference Joan also provided training in budget development, accounting and organizational planning to CAPACITAR team members. Salvadoran Team Coordinator Nancy Mayerhofer OSF and CAPACITAR Founder Pat Cane co-facilitated dynamics to encourage the process of “healing the healer.”

In the closing interchanges, team members suggested the formation of a Central American Regional Team with representatives from each country who would take the CAPACITAR program to new areas. The Salvadoran team in particular wanted to address the need for retreat and healing time together. As one woman said: “How can we give to others if we do not take time to heal ourselves. It is important to learn how to balance giving with receiving. And women in Central America have never taken time for themselves. How can our countries and families heal if we as women do not recognize our own need for healing.”

At a time when Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras are in the process of implementing peace accords, the work of these women is very important. Peace involves so much more than signing official documents. Peace is the fruit of healing wounds, working with forgiveness, learning new attitudes, and transforming relationships in the family, as well as in the society. Conference participants agreed that the learning and sharing of experiences helped them to realize that they were not alone in this process.
A Meeting of Sisters

—SISTER MARY STANTON RSM, BETHANY HOUSE, CINCINNATI

Little did I imagine when I was interdicted to CAPACITAR in Cincinnati, Ohio at Mercy Hospital Anderson in May of 1997, that in February of 1998, I would be part of a rich experience of empowerment and solidarity in Suchitoto, El Salvador. The way that this unfolded is part of the miracle of connection that I believe yearns to take place in the happenings and relationships in our lives. In my experience, it seems that one must simply stay open to the Spirit and go with the flow.

As a Mercy Sister for 27 years, I have known both the pain and the privilege of walking the journey to wholeness with women who have been beaten down by poverty, oppression, abuse and lack of opportunity. Formerly homeless and low-income working women attended the CAPACITAR weekend with me in Cincinnati. We all brought back to our ministry at Bethany House Services our enthusiasm for what we learned about natural healing and positive energy. Little by little, we began introducing Tai Chi and healing modalities into our homeless shelter. Staff and guests alike are coming to a deeper understanding of the mind, body, spirit relationship and are learning time-tested practices of natural healing that promote spiritual growth and mental health. The natural rhythmical movements and touches have come with ease and comfort to the primarily Afro-American population involved in our work at Bethany House.

Having thus been introduced to Pat Cane and CAPACITAR North American style, Mercy Associate Sue Kastman and I were intrigued with seeing the successful work that was being done in Central America. For the past ten years, we have had a sister relationship with a Salvadoran Christian base community which suffered greatly during the war. We last visited our families in 1992, and were set to return in 1998, a visit that we could easily coordinate with the CAPACITAR Regional Conference in El Salvador. We were so excited to be able to invite four women from our sister community to participate with us. The experience of sisterhood that we shared with women from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras was incredibly powerful. The rich fabric of courage and compassion that we wove from our shared life experiences will forever be a part of us and will inspire us to continue creating healing communities.

Most importantly, we were able to connect the women from El Roble, who are leaders, organizers, catechists and outreach workers in their community, to CAPACITAR. They were able to pour out their pain into a sacred, healing space. This symbolized a new beginning for them and a promising relationship with the CAPACITAR-Salvador team so that each can continue in her own process of transformation. Sue and I left our beloved community in El Salvador, knowing that we had been led to CAPACITAR in North America so that when we traveled south, we too could be part of this international linkage that is transforming the lives of all the women it touches.

Because We Want to Create —MIRNA MARTINEZ, SALVADORAN POET

Because we want to create a time that is ours today we have started to hike through all the bombed out areas of our country. All suffering has become ours. . . .

All grief, all hunger, full-scale protest is ours. We have stockpiled the mountains with hope.

Yet we sink to unthinkable depths
Get up at sunrise and shout implacably loud
Never to be silenced.

Thus nothing from our impossible past has died
Everything is here pushing us inexorably toward re-creating a collective future. . . .
We are CAPACITAR
We are wisdom and creativity embodied,
A voice for Gaia's energy unfolding,
We are community—discerning,
empowering and compassionate,
interconnected with all beings.
We are process, encouraging
inner and outer healing,
willing to be "in the cauldron"
of transformation.
We are willing to recognize
our wholeness and holiness,
willin to grow with peace,
power and love.
We are witness of the pain
and injustice around us,
willing to be companions
in the struggle to heal and
transform our world.
We believe in equality and diversity,
respecting differences.
We believe that giving
is the act of receiving,
that in healing ourselves
we heal our world.
We believe that we are interconnected,
part of ancestors and children to come,
part of soil, earth and stars.

—CAPACITAR Philosophy
Journey of Love and Healing

"I felt more safe here than I have ever felt in my life. Here I could be like a child. I never really had a childhood. I will not forget this. Thank you."
Isabel Ofelia Ularo, a young Mayan woman from Sololá spoke in the closing circle of a retreat, part of the 1997 CAPACITAR Women's Journey. For four days a group of seven Guatemalan women, three children and 13 North American women lived, studied and played together at the Lutheran Center in Antigua. Each day's activities began with a Tai Chi circle and a meeting of leaders from the Guatemalan and North American delegations. Activities ranged from studying Tai Chi, yoga, co-counseling, acupressure, chakras, to silly improvisation and parachute play.

"We had the chance to go deep," says Joan Lohman, Journey co-leader. "Each day around the meal table, I felt us coming together as a family of sisters. The fall Journey began with visits to a number of organizations and individuals with whom CAPACITAR has a long relationship. Visiting the graves of Carmen Garcia's mother, grandmother and great-grandmother as part of our Day of the Dead celebration fulfilled a great longing for me to join deeply in the lives of my Guatemalan sisters." Carmen has been a participant and guide for a number of CAPACITAR Journeys. She was a member of the CAPACITAR Team for the NGO World Forum on Women in China in 1995.

The trip was planned to coincide with Guatemala's celebration of Dia de los Muertos and included visits to three cemeteries and the giant kite festival in Sumpango. On the first day in Guatemala, Sister Rebeca Cervantes, director of CONFREGUA (national federation of religious) offered a moving presentation on the peace process, poverty, education and environmental issues in Guatemala. Other visits included conversations with Tierra Viva, a feminist organization, Rodolfo Robles, coordinator of CAMI and longtime union activist, and Sonia Luna Robles, participant in the women's sector of the peace process.

Each woman in the journey will recall different events. For some, it will be the all-day workshop with Sister Mary Bertrand's Mayan community. Mary brought together rural community leaders who have attended past CAPACITAR workshops. Joan led the trilingual circle in Rosen touch which evoked poetic, surprising and thoughtful responses in English, Spanish and Quiche. Talia de Lone from Philadelphia led the group in creating sounds and movements to energize the chakras. While Joan's Rosen work evoked tears, Talia's chakra work brought laughter and playfulness. The day included a hearty soup lunch prepared by the indigenous women. As the North Americans left, they were asked to line up and receive gentle hugs and blessings from the Mayan participants. "When my partner touched me, I felt I was receiving forgiveness for the actions of my country," offered Penny Mann, Journey co-leader. Sister Rebeca had told the group about the 440 Mayan villages that were destroyed during the massacres of the 80's. Another indelible moment was the ritual circle in Santiago Atitlan, held in the pastoral office of Stan Rother, an activist priest from the Midwest who was assassinated for his commitment to the poor. Each woman in the circle spoke the name and the story of someone she respected who is a warrior for social justice.

Through the journeys program, CAPACITAR is able to offer personal and spiritual support to women and men in places where their work for justice and peace have left them exhausted, grieving for disappeared loved ones, and burdened with the difficulties of their lives. And the journey participants from California, Massachusetts, Florida, Pennsylvania and Victoria, British Columbia, will carry the stories of those we met back to their web of communities in the U.S. and Canada.

When the Morning Comes — Julia Esquivel, Guatemalan Poet

We must rise early to urge on the breaking of the dawn, in order to sooner see the rising of the sun. We will return to listen to the singing of the birds greeting the new day near the waterfall... When the morning comes, widows will have families again, but now, we must rise early to hasten the arrival of the new day.

Very soon, the soothsayers will begin with drums and incense... and the prayers and the smoke will rise above us all...

"God lifts the poor out of the mud" and the powerful will fall upside down, those who cried will laugh, satisfied and everything will be as before.

When the morning comes.
CRONE's Corner

Crone Drums

-Carol Binlock RSCJ-CAPACITAR Crone Project, St. Louis, MO

March. Spring in the Midwest. Sap is rising. The sister of one of the crones in our St. Louis group comes from a group in Kansas to drum the sap even higher. She lets her white hair hang loose over her shoulders as she draws us into circle. At the center candles and masks mark the four energy-giving directions. The leader points to the mother drum in the north. The mother drum, she says, is like a bird in flight, leading the flock but occasionally needing to rest and let other drummers take over. She calls on our ancestors and elders to be present, and future generations as well.

Each of us has a drum set before us, and as the leader sets the beat for the first round, we join in. The cone of energy rises, subsides, builds up again. It is a universal earth language that no one has to translate. It is the beat of the earth-mother’s heart that no one needs to interpret. We are led back in time to the earliest rituals, when rhythm was the road into mystery, when our ancestors felt their way into wisdom together by simply keeping the beat. Six times we change places, moving around the circle and together creating those rhythmic patterns. Six times different women end up with the mother drum, each voicing her intention before giving the beat. Seeing the circle from six different positions is a lesson in itself; feeling the group coalesce around sound is another. For the seventh round we return where we began.

Our visitor shares with each of us a stone from her group. Our group gives her one of our rattles to take back to Kansas as a bond between the two groups.

Crones come as messengers of wisdom. They are teachers. They are wise women. And they return as links to bind group to group. Perhaps we are drumming up the day when the crone will take her rightful place of honor again, in the great circle of life.

CAPACITAR Calendar

1998

- First Sunday of each month, CAPACITAR Crones, Mercy Center St. Louis
  For information call: Sr. Carol Binlock RSCJ 314-621-4936
- April 4, CAPACITAR Level 3 Workshop—The Chakras, Mt. Alvina, CA 415-369-0798
- April 24-26, Women’s Retreat—Earth Body, Women’s Body, Sacred Body, Northern California 510-465-1277
- April 27-28, CAPACITAR Level 2, Richlands, Virginia, sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy
- April 29-May 1, Team Training, Mercy Regional Health System, Cincinnati, OH
- May 1-3, CAPACITAR Level 2, Mercy Hospital Anderson, Cincinnati, OH
- May 4-8, CAPACITAR Levels 1 & 2, Catherine Spalding Retreat Center, Nazareth KY, 502-348-1516
- June 5-7, CAPACITAR Level 1, Mercy Center St. Louis, MO
- June 12-13, CAPACITAR Level 2, Mercy Center St. Louis, MO
- June 14-15, CAPACITAR Level 4, Mercy Center St. Louis, MO
  For information call: Sr. Sharon Schmitz RSM 314-966-4313
- September 18-19, CAPACITAR Level 1, Franciscan Center, Dubuque Iowa
- October 3, CAPACITAR workshop, Spirituality Center, Sisters of St. Agnes, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin
- October 16-18, CAPACITAR Level 2, Cincinnati, OH 513-624-4560
- November 3-6, CAPACITAR workshops in Tegucigalpa, Honduras

1999

- January 21-31, Women’s Journey to El Salvador and Guatemala, co-led by Pat Cane and Joan Condon. For information or application: 408-722-7590

Women’s Journey to El Salvador and Guatemala—January 21-31, 1999

CAPACITAR

Meet and share with sister communities, grassroots groups and CAPACITAR teams in El Salvador and Guatemala on our 1999 Women’s Journey to Central America. Solidarity, friendship, and interchange will be the theme of the journey to be led by Founder/Executive Director Pat Cane and International Program Coordinator Joan Condon.

Salvadoran Team Coordinator, Nancy Meyerhofer OFS, Maria Isabel Figueras (former secretary to Archbishop Romero) and other Salvadoran team members will meet us in San Salvador and travel with us sharing the history, culture and struggle of the people. We will visit places consecrated by the blood of Archbishop Romero, the six Jesuits and the martyrs who worked to create justice and peace in their country. We will meet with friends from El Róbolo, a sister community, and visit rural communities in Aguacayco and El Barro. We will interchange with the midwives association and the center for defense of women’s rights in Suchitoto, a lovely lake-side town in the department of Cuscatlán.

From El Salvador the delegation will travel by chartered bus to Guatemala where we will be met by team members of CAPACITAR-Guatemala—Sister Mary Bertrand SSND (Founder and Director of the Sopóla center for spirituality), union leader Carmen García of FESTRAS, and Barbara Saquén, founder of the Mayan organization Madre Tierra. In Guatemala City we will visit the anthropological museum and a Mayan archaeological site, along with groups who have struggled for justice and peace. We will travel to Chichicastenango with its renown market, and then to the beautiful volcanic Lake Atitlán, visiting and sharing CAPACITAR workshops with Mayan groups in Sololá and Nahualá. We will travel by boat across the Lake to the Zutul village of Santiago Atitlán, where in the last decade many people died in the political violence. And we will celebrate in solidarity with many Guatemala friends who are part of the CAPACITAR family in Central America.

Journey accommodations will be in retreat centers, a guest house and a grassroots center. Air travel will be through Houston, to El Salvador, with return flight from Guatemala City. Overland travel will be with chartered bus.

Cost of the 1999 Women’s Journey is $1250, plus airfare. For more information or an application, contact the CAPACITAR office: 408-722-7590, FAX 408-722-7703, capacitar @igc.apc.org.
A Blessing on our Work

The old master said: "If you do the work that you do from a loving heart, then you will always be able to make something beautiful..."

May the light of your soul guide you.
May the light of your soul bless the work you do with the secret love and warmth of your heart.
May you see in what you do the beauty of your own soul.
May the sacredness of your work bring healing, light and renewal to those who work with you and to those who see and receive your work.
May your work never weary you.
May it release within you wellsprings of refreshment, inspiration and excitement.
May you be present in what you do.
May the day never burden you.
May dawn find you awake and alert, approaching your new day with dreams, possibilities and promises.
May you go into the night blessed, sheltered and protected.
May your soul calm, console and renew you.

_—Ayah Cara, John O'Donohue_


We welcome you to become part of our CAPACITAR network.

Please return the form below to: CAPACITAR, Inc.

23 East Beach St., Suite 206, Watsonville, CA 95076
408-722-7590  FAX 408-722-7703
E-mail: capacitar@igc.apc.org

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I would like to be part of the CAPACITAR network.

I would like to order a CAPACITAR Manual: Spanish____ English____

I would like to order a tax-deductible donation of $_____

Cost per manual: $12, plus $3 for postage and handling.

I would like to order a CAPACITAR 1998 Calendar____

Cost per calendar: $10, plus $2 for postage and handling.

CAPACITAR Inc.

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