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

Light in the Growing Darkness

During a recent trip to El Salvador, the lights went out after a heavy storm in Suchitoto—not unusual for this area badly hit by ten years of war and violence. Franciscan Sister Nancy Meierhofer and I scrambled outside to sit on the front steps and be with the neighbors. Suddenly in the darkness sparks of light began to appear all around us—fireflies! I had not seen fireflies since my early childhood in Texas, over fifty years ago. These sparks of light were moments of magic—appearing and disappearing in an instant, random bursts bringing hope and delight. I was disappointed when the lights finally came back on and we could again see. Yet I knew that the fireflies were still there in the night giving off their sparks of light.

For days after I reflected on the fireflies and the fruitful interplay of light and darkness—the necessity of these opposites. In the polarity of the Yin-Yang symbol of China, there is continual movement and transformation—light contains and transforms into the point of dark; then dark contains and transforms into the light. Both are necessary, both are important for life and transformative growth. As children we feared the dark or cried out in the night. As adults we try to escape our shadow side, fearing the dark nights of the soul, the daily deaths, the soul-forging challenges of life. And as much as we fear the dark, we also fear the brilliance, the energy, the fullness of the light. We try to hide, stifle or block the radiance of our love, our wisdom and gifts, blind to the beauty of light that we truly are. Yet the darkness is the fruitful womb, the rich soil in which the luminous new life grows.

In Central America “dar la luz” means to give birth—literally, to give light." In the womb of darkness in our lives and in our world, we must learn to see and nourish the sparks of light, becoming bearers of light. In the Scriptures we are told, "You are the light of the world.... Usually we doubt this and we doubt ourselves, feeling powerless in the growing darkness of our world. But if we don’t give our light, our own unique gift in this lifetime, the world will only be a little darker. To become a clear channel of light requires working to heal the wounded parts of ourselves, asking for the grace we need to clear the way, and then surrendering in the darkness knowing that we are held and guided on our journey toward the light. This process also involves a commitment to others, a desire to “dar la luz” to our families and our communities, animating and encouraging this radiant gift in those around us.

Often in our CAPACITAR work we meet persons who “dar la luz,” who are bearers of light in the darkness. Their lives inspire our efforts to enter the darkness and to radiate our own unique gift of light. This newsletter shares stories of women who shine their light and hope in the darkest of situations—in Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico, Laredo, Texas and Watsonville, California. When interviewed, most of these women were not even conscious of their unique gift of light and love they radiated to others. Yet their presence makes a great difference in the communities where they live and work. In Spanish these persons are often called “animadoras”—those who animate, radiate, bring life and joy, hope and empowerment to the community.

At this time of Autumn as we enjoy the last of the summer harvest and prepare ourselves for the growing darkness, may the stories of these women inspire the “animadoras” in each of us, empowering us to “dar la luz”, to radiate the unique light that only we can give to the world.

Help us to be the always-hopeful gardeners of the spirit who know that without darkness nothing comes to birth, as without light nothing flowers.

—May Sarton

—Pat Come, Executive Director
Radiating the Light: A Visualization

Sit or lie in a comfortable position, close your eyes and breathe deeply, letting the air flow through your body into your abdomen. Exhale and imagine that all your worries and preoccupations are released as you let go and relax into the present moment. Continue breathing deeply, tensing and relaxing each part of your body, from your feet to your head, as you move into a deeper state of relaxation.

Now visualize a sun or bright star shining over your head, a sacred radiance pouring gently down around you, giving you a profound sense of strength and protection. Feel the loving warmth of this radiance surround you and fill you, healing all the broken and wounded parts of your being.

Imagine this sacred radiance filling each part of you, penetrating and renewing each cell, cleansing and making you new. Take a moment to appreciate and enjoy the being of light that you truly are. Be grateful for your life, grateful for the unique gift that you have to shine forth in our world.

Now imagine that you are able to shine this light of your being, as naturally as you breathe in and out. Visualize your heart center radiating this loving light, to embrace yourself, your family, friends and colleagues, the people whose lives you share, touching the larger community where you live and work. Reach out also to embrace other parts of the world and the many people suffering from violence and poverty. Hold all of these people for some moments in your prayer of light and ask for healing and peace in our world. Once again come back to your heart center, and ask for whatever you may need to be a clear compassionate channel of light. Feel the peace and strength of your radiant soul.

When you are ready to conclude this visualization, breathe deeply and stretch your body. Feel centered and peaceful, filled with energy and radiant strength, ready to continue the work of the day, bringing your light and full attention to the present moment and to those around you.

Tai Chi Meditation: The Shower of Light—La Ducha de la Luz

Leaders of the Women's Sector of the Civil Assembly for the Guatemalan Peace Process move with the Tai Chi Shower of Light, asking for light in their personal lives and for healing of the violence in their country. The Shower of Light is one of the favorite movements of CAPACITAR Tai Chi meditation and is a good movement for starting the day—centering in the moment, letting go of the past, bringing light and wisdom to the work of the day. It is also an effective movement to use for a ritual or for focusing a group before starting a meeting.

Step forward on your left foot, knees slightly bent and right heel off the ground. Palms facing each other (separated a distance of about a foot), move your hands upward in a circular motion to head level. As you step back onto your right heel, move your hands downward as if you were receiving a shower of light. Continue the movement nine to twelve times with the left foot forward. Come to rest for a moment with arms at your sides, palms facing downward as if you were touching the earth. Then step forward on your right foot, left heel slightly raised, and repeat the same hand movement, nine to twelve times with the right foot forward. The movement may be accompanied by the following meditation.

Breathe deeply and feel the energy of the earth entering the balls of your feet, filling your entire body. Move your hands upwards and then downwards, imagining the energy of the heavens coming down upon you like a shower of light renewing your spirit. As you move with the left foot forward, connect with the parts of your being that need to be healed. Recognize the anger and violence within you, and then let go, permitting the energy of the heavens to cleanse and renew you, filling you with light and peace. As you move with the right foot forward, connect with the violence and woundedness of your home, your society and world. Recognize that and then let go. Visualize the light of the heavens filling the world, cleansing and renewing our families and communities, making us new each day, bringing hope and illumination to our planet. Finish the movement and come to rest with the light radiating from and filling the center of your heart.
Teaching at the Labor Camp
—Linda Wallace, Local Program Coordinator

For the last six years CAPACITAR has collaborated with Holy Names Sisters Mary Ondreyco and Inez Sherwood, to bring CAPACITAR’s program to farm women who pick strawberries and vegetables for Watsonville growers. Linda Wallace, Doris Devilliers and Teresa Pudilla have been teaching CAPACITAR healing techniques to these women, as well as helping them develop leadership skills.

Ana looks lovingly into the radiant beautiful face of her mother as she carefully massages the woman’s tired hands. The smiles of Ana and her mother Silvia bring rays of light into the community room of the Watsonville labor camp where they are practicing massage.

CAPACITAR holds meetings twice a month at San Andreas Labor Camp to teach women natural healing and stress reduction techniques which have been used for centuries by other women in many parts of the world to nourish themselves and gain inner strength. The women are very poor, do not speak English, do not have transportation, and have little access to medical and mental health care. The Tai Chi, visualization, acupressure, and massage taught by CAPACITAR offer them ways to release pain, stress, and anxiety while growing in self-knowledge, self-esteem, and emotional resilience.

The meetings are an outgrowth of the after school tutoring program provided by the Holy Names Sisters for children at the camp. After earning the trust and confidence of the children and their families, the Sisters suggested that the mothers might like to learn some of the natural healing techniques taught by CAPACITAR. First only a few women came to the meetings, but now up to 30 women and girls crowd in the small community room used for the tutoring program. The women particularly love massage because it soothes the aching in their bodies caused by hours of grueling work in the fields. The stooped position required for much of the field work blocks the body’s flow of energy, resulting in tension and pain in the back and neck. This pain and tension can be alleviated or reduced with massage and acupressure. It is a tremendous blessing and very empowering for these women to be able improve their own and their families’ physical well being with the skills they learn from CAPACITAR.

Teaching women to teach others is an important part of CAPACITAR’s mission to empower women to heal and transform themselves, their families, and their communities. Whenever possible CAPACITAR identifies leaders from their training groups to become group and workshop facilitators who can, in turn, teach other women. At the San Andreas camp, two women, Silvia and Maria, appear to have a natural ability to lead and motivate others and have been chosen to receive additional training. Silvia’s daughter Ana is also learning, alongside her mother, the skills required to teach CAPACITAR’s healing techniques. If all goes as planned, Silvia and Maria—and perhaps Ana—will become part of the team that will bring CAPACITAR’s program to women in other local labor camps next year.

Stone Soup—Light in Fresno
—Cherri Brown, Stone Soup/Share America

CAPACITAR recently worked with Stone Soup/Share America, a remarkable organization bringing much light to the people of Fresno. Stone Soup serves about 7,500 low-income residents of Fresno with several hundred volunteers from churches, schools and the community, providing tutoring, leadership training, summer youth programs and more. Stone Soup was one of twenty groups to receive the 1996 President’s Service Award, the nation’s highest award for volunteer service.

Stone Soup, a nonprofit service organization, began in 1992 in response to needs in the El Dorado Park area of Fresno, California, which has the highest proportion of Southeast Asian refugees in the nation. Basing their philosophy on the folk tale, Stone Soup encouraged each volunteer to bring his or her own talents and skills as ingredients for the “soup.” Stone Soup started with programs to educate and provide leadership training to “at risk” youth to prevent them from falling into gang violence and crime. The volunteers believe that strong families are the key to any prosperous and peace community, so they developed programs for pre-school age children through adults.

Stone Soup recently invited CAPACITAR to Fresno for a day of training which included staff members, several Stone Soup parents and five youth leaders of the Southeast Asian community. The day was wonderful and all learned not only about themselves, but about each person in the group. All left with a feeling of inner peace and encouragement, knowing they had some new tools to bring to the educational programs in the El Dorado Park area.
Nearly two years ago twenty women from Laredo, Texas flew to Mercy Center in St. Louis, MO to participate in a CAPACITAR workshop. When they returned to Laredo, they continued to meet and share what they had learned. This October Mercy Sisters Rosemary Welsh and Christine Blair and the women of Laredo invited Pat Cane for a weekend with over 60 women from the colonias, Mercy Medical Center and the local community. They have also formed a Laredo CAPACITAR team. The following are some of her experiences with the women of Laredo.

María Luz proudly showed me the place where her new home was to be built. As we chatted, Sister Christine Blair and her construction team, Armando and Ramon, discussed the size and direction of the trench which would form the foundation of María’s living room and kitchen. Christine and the construction team help people in the colonias, the isolated settlements on the outskirts of Laredo, to build or repair their own homes. Like a number of families in the colonias, María has lived for years with a dirt floor, an outhouse and no water or septic system. Weekly she trucks in large drums of water to provide for household cooking and washing. Of the 47 colonias populated by over 25,000 inhabitants, only 3 colonias have water lines and sewage systems, although they have been promised this for years. Life is hard for people in the colonias without public transportation or other community services, without water or paved streets, in some cases without electricity, with the heat and relentless dust blowing across the open plains. During the rainy season if the school bus can’t navigate the muddy roads, the children do not go to school. Over 50% of the population of Laredo lives at or below the poverty level. And most families who are employed receive only the minimum wage.

It is here that Mercy Sisters Rosemary Welsh and Christine Blair are animadoras, bearers of light empowering the gifts of the people. Mercy Center has supported outreach to families in the colonias with medical care, a mobile medical van, and a large school bus driven by Christine, to transport families to activities. A new community center/clinic and Headstart facility were recently built for the service of the colonias. And a growing spirit of community and solidarity is evident among the women as they support and encourage each other in their personal trials. At the CAPACITAR workshop many of the women generously contributed their skills and abilities helping with food, child care, games for the children, and donations for a raffle. The women sold tamales to pay for t-shirts and supplies needed for the workshop. Life continues to be a struggle for the women of Laredo, but there is much light in the love and hope they share with each other. I am reminded of the words of Guatemalan poet Julia Esquivel: “We must rise early to urge on the breaking of the dawn, in order to sooner see the rising of the sun.” With hope and commitment the women of Laredo are urging on the rising of the sun.
A New Light on Life —Hilda L. Peña, CAPACITAR—Laredo Team

My first experience with CAPACITAR was in St. Louis, MO, and to be honest, my expectations were low. I only expected to learn massage and relaxation techniques and never suspected the changes that would take place in my life as a result of that workshop. When the facilitator guided me in a visualization, I traveled inward to my sacred place surrounded by greenery, and found a woman there. To my surprise it was me as an adult. Then I saw the woman pick up a crawling baby. That baby was me. The baby became me as an adolescent, and later as an adult. I finally saw two adult images of myself and I realized that the woman within me took care of me as a child, a youth, and as an adult. I felt nurtured, loved and accepted. Later I saw the woman with her hands upraised towards the heavens, releasing a dove. With that I felt very positive and eager to learn more.

When I returned to Laredo after the workshop, I did not feel any change in myself, yet my children did. They noticed that I had surprisingly stopped snoring. And that was followed by a more important change. I no longer fought with my husband. He never said anything to me, but my children told me his comments: "Your mother is not fighting with me. Not only does she not get upset, now she wants me to stay calm just like her!" He seemed happily surprised by my change in disposition. My daughter also expressed joy at the change in my attitude. I realized this when I talked with her and she began to cry. I asked her why she was crying, and she said that I was listening to her differently. I have learned to listen to others and to appreciate the people around me. And I have learned to see the other person and feel their positive and negative energies. I never felt the change happen in me, but I noticed that it was harder for me to get upset. Somebody could be screaming and I could calmly listen, and then answer in the calmest way. I still get upset, but just for the moment and only with the issue at hand. I no longer feel guilty about "how bad I was" but have learned to enjoy the moment and say "I know I can do better." I have also lost twenty pounds without a diet, feel better about myself and see the world in a new and wonderful light.

It has been a privilege to learn from CAPACITAR and to be able to teach my relatives, friends and others. It has changed my life for the better, and I just feel happier.

COMMUNITY. SOMEWHERE, THERE ARE PEOPLE TO WHOM WE CAN SPEAK WITH PASSION... SOMEWHERE A CIRCLE OF HANDS WILL OPEN TO RECEIVE US, EYES WILL LIGHT UP AS WE ENTER, VOICES WILL CELEBRATE WITH US WHENEVER WE COME INTO OUR OWN POWER.
COMMUNITY MEANS STRENGTH THAT JOINS OUR STRENGTH TO DO THE WORK THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE. ARMS TO HOLD US WHEN WE FALTER.
A CIRCLE OF HEALING. A CIRCLE OF FRIENDS.
SOMEPLACE WHERE WE CAN BE FREE.

—STARHAWK, DREAMING THE DARK

Bottom photos—
Left: The women of Laredo offering their light and gifts to heal themselves and their community. Center: Sr. Rosie Welsh brings her medical knowledge and loving support to a family hand massage. Right: Colonía women and children enjoying the Mercy bus ride to the CAPACITAR workshop.
Center Photos—
Top: Sr. Christine works as bus driver, carpenter and animadora for many families. Center: Laredo women learning active listening and visualization skills. Right: Women experiencing their power and energy with Pat Dan Gum.
—Photos by Pat Cane.
Rekindling Light in El Salvador

A week before he was assassinated, Archbishop Oscar Romero said: “Nothing is so important as the human person, above all, the person of the poor and the oppressed, who besides being human beings, are also divine beings...The bloodshed and deaths in El Salvador are beyond all politics. They touch the very heart of God.” The wounds of the 10-year war, paid for in great part by our own country, have deeply touched the heart of CAPACITAR, and we are committed to do what we can to bring healing and empowerment skills to El Salvador. Violence has become a way of life here, with an average of 24 people killed daily, and an extremely high rate of domestic abuse.

During our August workshops we trained religious, grassroots groups, health promoters, parish leaders, counselors and ex-combatants in San Salvador, Sonsonate, Chalatenango and Suchitoto. People are very eager to learn whatever they can to heal their highly traumatized society. Most people do not have access to psychologists, so it is important to train grassroots groups and individuals in simple counseling and self-help skills. Franciscan Sister Nancy Meierhofer will work parttime as CAPACITAR Coordinator for El Salvador and will offer Level 1 workshops to groups. Nancy has training in bioenergetics and counseling, and for many years has worked in Latin America, first in Chile under the dictatorship, and then in Suchitoto, an area badly affected by the war. Our hope is that the arms we have paid for to destroy a people, will be replaced with arms of love and hands of healing touch.

The Labyrinth in Guatemala

Diana’s indigenous black eyes flashed with tears as she choked on the image of the red rag shoved into her mouth to silence her. She was 4 years old when the soldier broke into her home and raped her. Numbed she stuffed the feelings of rage and fear into her heart. At age 14 five soldiers captured her family and forced her to watch while they tortured and slaughtered her father and brother. Then they gang raped her. Later the army pillaged and burned Diana’s village in the Highlands of Guatemala and neighbors and friends were brutally killed or run off. For months she wandered in the mountains foraging for food with other survivors. Her act of resistance was to be silent and to stop crying, the only thing she could do to maintain her inner strength in the midst of the terror. Diana came to the CONFREGUA (National Federation of Religious of Guatemala) workshop for survivors, having lived with these horrific memories for nearly 20 years, unable to sleep or find peace. The workshop was facilitated by a team of psychologists, a doctor and Pat Cane and Mary Litell of CAPACITAR. With an integrated program of body/mind energy work, ritual, psychotherapy and eye movement desensitization therapy, the team worked with the survivors and trained counselors who would accompany their process.

One of the powerful healing tools shared at the workshop was the labyrinth, constructed with bright colored rope taped to the chapel floor. The first night the group walked the Chartres-patterned labyrinth as a community in the darkness with only candles illuminating the journey. Tears flowed as painful memories were released and the healing power of this ancient tool touched a ll. Diana walked the labyrinth many times during the workshop. She later described the experience: “The labyrinth has been very sacred for me. I feel something new flowing in my body, in my veins—a great peace, tranquility and joy. I feel embraced and held in the hands of God. The image of the river of blood and tortured bodies that I have lived with has been replaced by an inner refuge of clear blue waters and greenery, and I am able to sit on a large rock watching the beauty of the clouds and the water falls. In the silence of the night with only the sound of the rain and the crickets, I walked and rewalked the labyrinth and found deep peace and healing. The experiences I have lived through have given me the light, wisdom and compassion to better work with hundreds of orphaned children who, like me, have suffered so much.”
Natural Healing in Mexico

Indigenous religious Coty Faz proudly showed us the new natural health center recently built in a village near Taco Talpa, Tabasco, with funds from CENAMI, the National Center for Indigenous Missions. The small clinic has a room for consultation and treatment, a kitchen and a small meeting room. On several shelves stand jars of dried medicinal plants and tinctures of herbs, prepared by local women as natural remedies. In a small plot along side the clinic the women have planted a number of herbs to be harvested, dried and used for healing.

For the last six years Coty Faz has trained health promoters from villages in the states of Tabasco and Chiapas. Because of the economic crisis in Mexico and the lack of medical resources, few people have access to pharmaceuticals and to health care. Many of the indigenous peoples have a long tradition of healing methods, as well as a vast knowledge of medicinal herbs. However, wanting to appear modern, they have abandoned their healing practices. Coty is working to change this attitude and has encouraged the women to talk with their elders to learn about traditions and practices that have been lost. Monthly Coty organizes workshops to train health promoters in herbs, massage and other natural healing skills. For a very low price the women can also buy remedies, herbs and tinctures prepared by the health team.

It was a joy to facilitate a CAPACITAR workshop in this setting working with people so eager to learn. A number of the women and children walked many miles or traveled by bus for several hours to be able to come. The children participated along with the adults, and one five year old boy fascinated all of us, learning the Tai Chi movements and acupressure points as if he were an adult. Some of the women were barely literate, yet they quickly learned with a great desire to teach the skills to their own communities. In spite of the violence, repression and economic hardship in Mexico, these women are bringing light and empowerment to their families and communities.

A Light of Support
—Special Thanks to
The Capacitar
Empowerment Team

Capacitar is deeply grateful to our "Empowerment Team"—the women and men who regularly make monthly, quarterly, semi-annual, and annual donations to Capacitar. These donations enable Capacitar to meet ongoing monthly expenses that must be covered to provide our services to marginalized women in the US and Latin America.

THANK YOU—Rev. Mary Atwood, Sharon Carberry, Ann Carr, Lin Colavin, Joan Condon, Anne Elye Cowan, Mary Clare Dachauer, Kay Deli, Nancy Farnam, Kathy Fitzgerald, Ann Flower and Vinc Koller, Eileen Gargan, Ann Getzoff, Alice Godfrey, Dolores Gonzales, Jessie Gretzinger, Maureen Hally, Gertrude Karrow, Lynn Kennedy, Diane Klein, Martha Kokes, Jeanne Leavitt, Penny Mann, Suzy and Walter Marks, Sr. Dolores McDonald, Ann Miesner, Clare Morris, Mary Pearl, Charlotte Pitts, Jeane Rosen, Jo Ann Sequist, Sarah Seybold, Santa Chavez Silverman, Daisy Thompson, Elizabeth Williams, and Norma Wright. Your generous support empowers much light.

1996 CAPACITAR Calendar—Rituals, Benefits, Presentations and Workshops

- November 23 CAPACITAR Holiday Benefit Boutique 1-400, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 6401 Freedom Blvd. Apts., CA—Holiday gifts, music, holiday desserts, seated massage, face painting, fun
- December 5-15 CAPACITAR Journey to Nicaragua and Guatemala co-led by Joan Lohman and Darts DeVilliers. For information or an application call: 408-761-5893 or 510-530-8031
- December 6 Watsonville Headstart Workshop 9-1200
- December 29 CAPACITAR New Year Ritual 1-400 p.m. Lake Freedom, CA. For information call 408-761-5893.
- 1996-97 Watsonville Local Program—alternating Monday evening workshops at San Andreas labor camp and in-town, Watsonville. For information call Local Program Coordinator Linda Wallace 761-5893.

Activities to note for 1997

- April 16-25—Women's Retreat Journey to Guatemala co-led by Joan Lohman and Penny Mann. For information or an application call Joan Lohman 510-530-8031 or 408-761-5893
- June 27-28, Level 1 Workshop; June 29-30, Level 3 Workshop, facilitated by Pat Cane—Mercy Center, St. Louis, MO. For information call Sr. Sharon Schmitz 314-966-4313
- July 25-26 Women's Retreat of Spirituality and Solidarity co-sponsored and co-facilitated by Pat Cane of CAPACITAR and Rev. Ellen Grace O'Brien, of the Center for Spiritual Enlightenment, at Presentation College, Los Gatos, CA. For information: 408-761-5893 or 408-244-5151
By being willing to receive,
we draw down the light.
It pours through us continually
wherever we stand.
We need to share this light with our community,
to talk about it, to live it out,
to move it back into the earth...
to stand and hold a space for spirit
to come into all our relationships...
The challenge is
not just to have visions and dreams,
but to make them real...

—Brook Medicine Eagle from
_The Feminine Face of God_
by Sherry Anderson and Patricia Hopkins

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