

To
**Representatives Eckert, Horton, LaFalce
 and Senators D'Amato and Moynihan.**

We, the undersigned, request that no U.S. military aid, troops or advisors be sent to assist the contra forces trying to overthrow the Nicaraguan government. We urge that the U.S. honor the request made in early December by eight Latin American nations urging that the U.S. begin to negotiate directly with Nicaragua for a peaceful solution. Lasty we support the recommendation of Cardinal O'Connor when he told the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee that "... only a political solution can finally be successful in Nicaragua; ... there is no acceptable military solution."

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To Our Fellow Citizens: If you agree with this advertisement, please take a minute and do two things. (1) Mail a letter asking that no U.S. aid of any kind be given to the contras, to your Congressman, Washington, D.C. 20515. (2) Send a contribution to Committee for Peace in Central America, c/o Harris, 64 Butler Drive, Pittsford, New York 14534 to continue our campaign.

The Urban Plunge



From left to right are Notre Dame students who took the Urban Plunge: Mark Oberlies, Tom Warth, Nick Steck, Char Beyer, and Mike Higgins.

Seeking the soul of the city

By Teresa A. Parsons

Taking the Urban Plunge in Rochester last week meant two days of surprises for five Notre Dame University students.

First of all, they didn't expect to have so much fun. Staying at Our Lady of Mount Carmel rectory was more comfortable and hospitable than expected. The food was good and plentiful, and the neighborhood not nearly as threatening as they had anticipated.

"We went into this expecting to sleep on a cold floor and be cold," one student remarked. "I really didn't expect to eat for two days ... They told us you'd eat at a soup kitchen and then someone said we'd get bread and water."

Each January, a Notre Dame University course known as the Urban Plunge takes students on a 48-hour trip into a world most have never encountered before — even though that world exists next door to the places they grew up. During their holiday break, students who have returned to their homes all over the country visit a nearby city to observe and participate in urban ministries. This year, five travelers came to the inner-city world of Rochester from their homes in Penfield, Brighton, Buffalo, Allegany and Medina. All in their junior or senior year, the students major in fields ranging from mechanical engineering to government and liberal arts.

Most of the students were familiar with downtown Rochester, but not with places like St. Peter's Kitchen or Corpus Christi's outreach programs or the Spanish Apostolate — just a few of the stops they made in the intensive two-day venture. The Urban Plunge confronts students with the effects of injustice, poverty and apathy, and introduces them to people working to alleviate those conditions.

Not all the surprises were pleasant. Mark Oberlies, a senior accounting major from Penfield, felt mixed emotions at the number of children who come to soup kitchens — sad because their parents can't afford to feed them, but grateful that someone does.

For both Oberlies and Nick Steck, another senior accounting major, poor people were surprisingly ordinary. "These people are just like we are. They're just a little bit poorer, and they're a community with a somewhat different attitude," said Steck.

"I really enjoyed being at the soup kitchen today, talking to people," Oberlies said. "I don't feel that different when I'm down there with them. That felt good — it wasn't a real bummer. It was good to see people getting fed and coming in to get warm."

Mike Higgins, a junior from Allegany majoring in mechanical engineering, was impressed by the complexity of poverty. "I was surprised how complicated the whole poverty thing is, how it spreads through the city and how hard it is to fight," he said.

Higgins had assumed that an influx of middle class people or yuppies (young urban professionals) into a run-down neighborhood would be an unqualified advantage. But he learned that, although such people are attracted to poor areas by cheap housing, their presence drives the value of other housing up. Beyond a certain point, the truly poor can no longer afford to live there.

"These people are just pushed all over the city. It doesn't help them at all," Higgins observed. "They get hurt."

Corpus Christi Parish was the place that most impressed Tom Warth of Brighton, a senior majoring in government studies. "They're so productive," he said of the variety and depth of their outreaches — a homeless shelter, health clinic, food distribution and nightly supper, the Rogers House for ex-offenders.

"It's such a small parish and it's poor. And yet I come from a suburban parish where we wouldn't dream of things like this," Warth said. "Right away we'd say we don't have the money and how are we going to get the people to volunteer ... No one would believe it could work."

"These people believe it will work, and it does," he added.

In the urban ministers he met, Steck saw for the first time the gospel values and doctrine of Catholicism he learned as a child integrated with the Christian lifestyle of an adult.

"It seems like around here the two are equivalent — being a Catholic and living as a Christian are the same thing," he said, noting that they are not content to just go to Mass and follow the rules. They incorporate the spirituality of their faith with the way they help people.

For Medina native Char Beyer, a senior in liberal arts, the people she met personified a quote from Pope John Paul II: "Above all a city needs a soul if it is to become a true home for human beings. You the people, must give it this soul."

"All of them seemed so strong and so giving and so compassionate — there was an air about them," Beyer said. "Two or three of them used the same term for their lives — of evolving into their ministry. I thought that was something that should happen in life."

"The idea that you never arrive — that you're on a divine voyage, maybe," Warth added.

The Urban Plunge attempts to challenge participants without overwhelming them. One reason it works is because most of the urban ministers traced the evolution of their ministries to a time when they too were students — searching for jobs, trying to establish lifetime goals.

Although all five students were sure that the experience had affected them, none were sure what the long-term results might be.

"It's hard to picture yourself there (in an urban ministry), especially if it's something you've never tried," Steck said. "Right now, I couldn't see myself in that single role of doing that entirely ... But I think that's what is more needed — not so many more people involving their whole lives, but more people willing to help a little."

"These people's lives were so entrenched in this ... They seem to have thought about it a lot more than I thought about what I was going to do," Oberlies said. "That was good for me because I have to think about why I'm doing what I'm doing."

"I really got into it, and I really wanted to learn and try to understand where they thought their ministry was going and how things were going to change and how they were helping to bring about that change," he added. "But then I thought 'Geez, what about me? I really don't know. It's tough stuff.'"