

# HOME FOR THE HEART

Founding History and Reflections of Sacred Heart Community Service  
— 1960s to 2000 —



**Louise Benson, Our Inspiration**

## HOME-BASED PROJECT | 1964 – 1984

In 1964, Louise Benson started Sacred Heart Community Service (SHCS) in her home on Leona Court in San Jose to help the poor with food, clothing and furniture. She was an extremely capable person, able to create and implement visions at the same time while helping those in need. Louise followed two maxims: "The Lord will provide," and "Just do it!"



A volunteer, Louise Benson, Lee Lindsay



Joe Tembrock and Barbara Zahner

Sacred Heart Community Service has a long history of collaborative efforts. Louise brought together people of affluence (from outlying areas of Santa Clara County such as Los Altos, Saratoga, Cupertino, and West San Jose) together with less materially advantaged people in the inner city. Louise also started Martha's Kitchen, to provide hot meals for the needy. Joe Tembrock, a founding SHCS board member, remembers "I was awed that this small, somewhat elderly lady did so much with purpose, conviction, and spirit."

Barbara Zahner remembers her first contact with Louise, years before she was hired by SHCS: "I was doing high school and junior high youth education work at Holy Spirit parish in the Almaden area of San Jose," Zahner says, "and this woman called and said, 'Easter is coming. I need 400 beautifully decorated Easter eggs. I'm going to put you down for some. And I want them really beautifully done because our children don't have beauty in their lives. They need to have something really beautiful.' " "Who are you?" Zahner asked incredulously. "Louise Benson, Sacred Heart Community Service," the caller replied. Barbara came through with the beautifully decorated eggs. "I told my husband, 'I think I just met a saint,' " she recalls.

Joe Tembrock and Sammy (Sheila) Burch - who later also served as a board member - remember bringing furniture and clothes to Louise's modest home by the railroad tracks. Baby clothes were stored in the basement and furniture in the garage. Lee Lindsay served as

president of the board. At the annual meetings in Louise's home, volunteers sat on the floor and Louise always began with a prayer.

Each year it was determined how many Christmas food baskets would be distributed. Recalling those early days, Mary Miller, then - President of Presentation High School chuckled, "The harder Louise prayed, the more work we did!" Founding board member Duwayne Penfold helped with the distribution. Bellarmine College Prep and Presentation High School collected canned goods and pennies to support the annual Christmas Food Drives.

With the help of Rex and Lee Lindsay, SHCS expanded. Lee was Louise's driver, as Louise didn't drive. In 1972, with the counsel of founding board member attorney Mike Shea, SHCS was incorporated as a nonprofit organization. Lee served on the Board and Rex was an original, foundational volunteer; they were donors from the home-project days. Rex began hosting an annual Walk on the Wild Side Dinner, which raised about \$20,000 a year between 1987 and 1993.

## **SACRED HEART PARISH LOCATION | 1984 – 1990**



Buildings at Sacred Heart Parish in San Jose



Sacred Heart Church

In 1984 due to complaints from Louise's neighbors, SHCS needed to move. Father John Coleman, pastor of Sacred Heart Church on Willow Street in San Jose offered rooms for SHCS at the closed parish school. Sr. Nancy Koke, and Sr. Deanna Von Bargen joined SHCS as staff. Trained as teachers and knowing the value of education, they worked together to develop an after-school homework program, ESL (English as a Second Language) classes and Home Visits - in addition to continuing the basic services of food and clothes.

In May 1986, Louise died. The Board grappled with continuing or closing the agency. Later, Sr. Nancy described the decision to continue “like Pentecost.” The Board moved from fear to faith. They chose to stay open and renew, and in March 1987 they hired Barbara Zahner as the first Executive Director. She was a unique positive leader with exceptional talent and energy for setting the highest expectations, planning and organizing, asking for volunteers and encouraging them, supporting staff and the board, and for overall-caring for the those in economic need.

Norma Preciado-Burton was a volunteer in 1986, and on the SHCS staff from 1987 - 2004. She wrote about one of those first years: “It was a Saturday, and we were setting up our Christmas food boxes for our three days of serving our clients. One hundred volunteers were coming to help bag 800 pounds of beans that had been ordered from Second Harvest Food Bank. However, when it was time to check to see where the sacks of beans had been stored, they were nowhere to be found. .... In a panic, I looked at my notes and realized that I had not ordered the beans. Our volunteers would be there to pack beans in less than two hours. I went to my loft office and called Second Harvest Food Bank. Too late – they had no beans left. I prayed, “Lord, I need your help!” Not five minutes later, my phone rang. It was a potential first-time donor who had heard that we provided Christmas food boxes for our families. Believe me I was in no mood to explain anything; I was concerned about the volunteers who thought they were coming to pack beans. It was so sad that our families would not have the food staple that meant at least two meals for their families. The donor said, “I’d like to help. What is it that you need?” I heard myself say, “how about eight hundred pounds of beans?” Now here’s the miracle. “He said when do you need it?” I told him I needed it in a couple of hours. “No problem” I heard him say. Within 2 hours a huge truck pulled up with not 800 pounds of beans but 1000 pounds of beans. Even if a person didn’t believe in miracles, spending time at Sacred Heart Community Service still caused them to often think, “hmm how did that happen?”

Sr. Teresita, now a nurse, remembers being at SHCS from 1987 to 1990 to help with food distribution and the clothes closet. Joe Tembrock remembers her as “Sister Chili Pepper” because of her high energy level. Sr. Teresita than assisted with Job Placement, which included interviewing candidate/employers for house cleaning, domestic work, and labor/construction.

Norma remembers what she considered a miracle from the last Christmas SHCS shared space at Sacred Heart Parish. So many donations of food and toys were coming in that a large trailer/van was being used for temporary storage each day. It could not be locked, so every evening its contents were unloaded and carried into the offices to be safely stored. One evening, all the other staff left before Norma; the trailer was full and it seemed she alone was

going to have to move everything by herself. Norma's frustration must have shown on her face just as a client, Maria, walked by. They recognized each other, and Maria asked what was so upsetting. Norma explained, and Maria said, "Just wait a few minutes." Within a half hour, 15 women marched in and said they wanted to help unload. Maria had knocked on doors, and SHCS was so respected that others had stopped their dinner preparations to come lend a hand. Within 45 minutes, everything had been moved into a lockable location.

Using rooms in the school building served SHCS's purposes for about five years, and the rent charged was reasonable. We were ready to remain there – Fr. Mateo Sheedy had other designs in mind for the building. Through many newsletters to supporters, and a Letter to the Editor of the Mercury News, Barbara strived to get public opinion to support SHCS staying in Sacred Heart School. Fr. Sheedy was adamant and Bishop Pierre DuMaine confirmed his decision. SHCS was forced to move to another location.

## **STOREFRONT MINISTRY | 1990-1998:**



803 South First Street murals



Getting ready for Christmas



803 South First Street from 1st Street

Tom Vais, the former executive director of United Way of Santa Clara County, worked with Barbara on a 10-Step process. With guidelines he urged newly incorporated nonprofits to follow as they moved beyond a Founding a Board of Directors. Ann Danner, Executive Director of the non-profit Development Center, which assisted charitable organizations, was hired as a consultant. She says: "My role was to help the organization and its board to make a very difficult transition from an all volunteer effort to one which ultimately was able to raise significant funds."

Barbara Zahner built a board that represented all of the community, and all were inspired by her leadership and talents. She had a vision of a Sacred Heart Community Center. Joe Tembrock was elected board president and Neil Fanoe, treasurer. Also joining the board were Fr Bill Muller (the president of Bellarmine College Prep High School), and Mary Miller (a long-time

volunteer and the then-president of Presentation High School). Bob Johnston was a key member of the SHCS board as he had invaluable board experience at CET (Center for Employment Training, San Jose). He also was a member of the team that secured the Packard grant.



1998 Board of Direction (Missing Al Moreno and Andre Chapman)

**Back row:** l-r: Elisa Dumesnil, Bill Blaze, Jim Gibbons, Chuck Stegner, Chip Evans, Joe Tembrock, Valerie Nicoletti, Bill Muller SJ

**Middle row:** l-r: Kathie Sheehy, Charlotte Rogers, Mary Miller

**Front row:** l-r: Bob Johnston, Amalia Ibarra, Barbara Zahner, Emo Biagini, Neil Fanoe

The mission of SHCS continued to be “to minister with dignity, compassion, and respect to those in need, providing emergency services and the means for self-sufficiency, and to provide opportunities for volunteers to love, share, and serve.” SHCS’s commitment to respond to the changing needs of the poor in the community had led to an increased emphasis on programs which provide self-sufficiency. A trailer was added on the side of the property so there would be room for administration of the increasing services and programs. The staff of 11 full-time-equivalents and hundreds of volunteers positively affected the lives of tens of thousands of individuals and families each year. Food, clothes, housing, jobs, health care, citizenship preparation, legal services, family support, and education from toddler to teen to the elderly – all were provided to clients at no cost. All welcomed. All served with dignity, respect and compassion. Norma remembers the emphasis on “Just by listening, you’ve already helped.”

Barbara recalls: “A young IBM employee named Terry Ramirez, a child of the *barrio*, approached Sisters Nancy and Deanna about launching an evening ESL (English as a Second Language) class. They agreed; however, they cautioned they could not put energy or funds into the program. ‘No problem,’ answered Terry in her can-do fashion, ‘we will do it with help from IBM and others.’” And so began our ESL classes in the run-down cafeteria of Sacred Heart School. Because the Board recognized quality, the members asked Terry to join the Board in 1989-great! Terry then led the Board Development (recruitment) committee before passing away from cancer in the late 1990s. The large multipurpose room at SHCS was dedicated in Terry’s honor.

Volunteers have always been an important component of the SHCS mission. In the late 90s, 2,000 corporate and private individual volunteers made the programs possible. They are still involved in every aspect of the organization, and include youth, donors, and clients of all economic levels working together as a team.

Norma shared: “Barbara and others often planned Donor Appreciation dinners. Local restaurants would donate the food, and I worked with 20 lady clients each occasion to serve the meal to those we were thanking. Their job was to welcome and serve the guests. They loved being a part of the events. All year they would come up and ask when the next event was, saying ‘I will be there to help!’ This was all done out of gratitude. The thought was that it was good for donors to see the faces of those they helped. And *visa versa!*”

Norma recalled, “Staff always remembered Barbara’s guidance: ‘We can count on donations coming in the back door and quickly going out the front door – The Lord will provide.’” Staff at SHCS often felt they were short of turkeys and/or toys as holidays approached, but they didn’t worry. They just knew that when the deadline arrived, what was needed would have shown up. In fact, Norma recalls, “I can not remember any time when we had a shortage of food, volunteers, or donations.”

In October of 1997, a major fire destroyed the Basic Needs building. Stunned community members gathered past midnight at the still-smoldering site. They thanked God no one was hurt. They asked angels to watch over the building and protect it from graffiti and looters. Kathie Sheehy remembers that members of one local gang came and painted words on the outside sidewalk saying, “this is protected space – do not damage.” There was no looting, graffiti, or further harm done to the building.



Barbara Zahner after the fire at 803 South First Street

Staff and community members prayed SHCS would find the money to rebuild. Those prayers were abundantly answered. Fire insurance covered repairs. Donations flowed in to replenish clothes, food, desks and files. First Lady Hillary Clinton was in town to visit daughter Chelsea for Thanksgiving, and heard of the destruction. Astoundingly, she joined us along with Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren (former Santa Clara County Supervisor) and Mayor Susan Hammer to distribute Thanksgiving food baskets in a building still blackened with soot, yet shining with hope.



Barbara Zahner, Zoe Lofgren and Hillary Clinton Thanksgiving Food Distribution

For years, the board and Barbara Zahner dreamed of creating a better home for *The Heart*. Working with staff, they envisioned a centrally located, home-like place on one or more bus lines, where all in need would be welcomed. A larger facility would provide greatly increased capacity to offer more services to even more individuals and families. Yet the transition from a founding board to governing board was very challenging.

Initially, the Board had considered raising funds to purchase the existing site and adding more rooms there. Careful facility reviews and program evaluation determined that this solution would not meet the agency's needs. Twice there were board votes to stop the move to a new building. Yet the majority of the board voted to continue the project. Advisors were brought together to guide the agency through the steps of evaluation and determination of the best courses of action. New building sites began to be considered. New members were recruited to join the board.

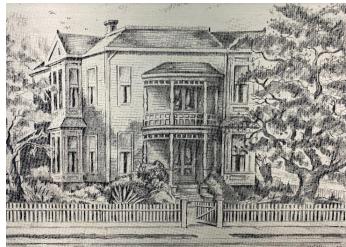
Building a new facility would be the first capital campaign for the organization. Project and organizational development efforts began in 1992, when the first request for capital funds was made to the City of San Jose. The City committed \$1.6 million to the project - the largest city grant they had ever given to a nonprofit organization.

One new site considered an ideal solution by the staff and Board was an empty Safeway grocery store a few blocks away. City officials thought otherwise, however, as they wanted the facility for a city library and youth recreational center. Because the funds had not been expended, the City gave a deadline for the use of the money. A condition of receiving these funds was for SHCS to obtain matching donations by December 1996.

Glorian Quigley invited the Packard Foundation to tour the facilities. Bob Johnston led the tour and we were blessed with a significant donation. At the request of Mr. Packard before his death, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation granted \$1.6 million. This was one of the largest grants given by the Packard Foundation.

Colleen Lukoff, Capital Campaign Coordinator, worked closely with the Board, Executive Director, Campaign Leadership Committee, Grant Writer and staff, to organize and execute this Capital Campaign. The Kresge Foundation granted \$750,000. Neil Fanoe persuaded Jack Going to become the capital funds campaign leader. Jack, a cradle Catholic, practiced the Hebrew phrase "Repairer of the breach." He then asked Eli Reinhard for the first major gift. Graciously, Eli responded with a lead donation of \$100,000.

The final chosen building site was owned by the five Zanger children; getting all to agree to the sale presented a major challenge. During the great depression Mrs. Zanger always had food for the homeless. An excellent real estate agent, Jerry Strangis was hired. Pierre Prodis was selected as architect; Blach Construction as builder. The estimate came in at over 6 million dollars; the committee was shocked but did not give up. The teams all worked under the assumption that the best would be done with what they had to work with at the time.



Zanger house drawing



Architect Pierre Prodis



Blach Const



Hill House Move

Arrangements were made to move the historical Andrew P. Hill House; Emo Biagini provided prosecco and goodies at 6 AM the day of the move. Board member Bill Blaze contributed \$25,000 to help with moving expenses. The Zanger property was zoned to be used by commercial/nonprofit AND residential. Habitat for Humanity, led by Johnny Dawson, had joined the project and built four residential low income units and helped with this new SHCS building.

There were several challenging situations where there were disagreements between Habitat and SHCS. Joe Tembrock called a noon meeting at HP (Hewlett Packard) to discuss the differences between Barbara Zahner and Johnny Dawson, saying meetings would be held every day at noon until the differences were resolved. Johnny brought flowers for Barbara the next morning. Disagreements again surfaced with Habitat for Humanity at a board meeting. Fr Bill Mueller calmly basically said "We are sorry - let's move on". Basic plans were then drawn up and a review process started. Joe Tembrock worked at HP where most offices were open space. Because of that experience, he asked that every office and every door be justified to have maximum future space options.

## PURPOSE-BUILT, SELF-OWNED BUILDING | 1998 – TO PRESENT

Ground was broken for a 20,000 sq. ft. center on this Zanger site - 1.75 tree-studded acres located on First and Alma Streets in San Jose. This new site was adjacent to central crossroads served by five bus lines and the light rail. The project was completed in 1998 with \$6 million raised, with no debt, and additional \$1.1 million having been raised to initiate an endowment fund and to create a reserve for capital projects.



Ground Breaking: Barbara - Joe Tembrock Mayor Susan Hammer

A moving parade, alive with music, was organized with whole-hearted support from the San Jose Police Department, including banners with the words "This is the day the Lord has made," and high-stepping horses mounted by Police Officers. Staff and board members, along with city and county officials, volunteers and community members paraded from First and Virginia to First and Alma, the home for "*The Heart*". Alma means "soul" or "spirit" in Latin. How fitting to be centered first in a Spirit of Love. The spirit of love continued.



Moving Parade - Chip Evans left - Charlotte Rogers next, then Kathie Sheedy - Joe Tembrock far right



Completed Building



Opening Sign



Barbara Zahner at Opening



Pantry in the New Building



Clothes Closet in the New Building

SHCS continued to expand from its original goal of providing basic necessities to the needy to also offer education, immigration and rent assistance, financial counseling, job readiness (including computer-skills training, resume preparation and interview skills), and many more services. All continued to be free. In addition to providing basic services, the focus became to create hope, opportunity, and action by building a community free from poverty.

SHCS has kept the spirit of Louise and Barbara alive and growing. Joe Tembrock says that he almost levitates with joy whenever he visits SHCS.

**More pictures:**



Norma Preciado Burton -Volunteer/Staff



Joe Zanger - Owner/ Joe Tembrock -Board

**NOTES:** Joe Tembrock is the longest-serving volunteer in Sacred Heart Community Service (SHCS) history, beginning in Louise's home, and now leading efforts to record these memories and facts. Barbara Zahner helped with editing and reminiscences. Barbara is extremely talented in presenting ideas in writing then promulgating the ideas in convincing speeches. She had a vision of a loving home for SHCS. She built an awesome board of directors and challenged the board to accept her vision and with the team spirit to raise the funds and develop an inspiring organization. Kathie Sheehy (a former Board member) became interested in collecting more stories from past SHCS staff members and shared in the development of this document.