



A Magazine of the Center for International Studies at the University of St. Thomas
Spring 2010

Welcome

Welcome Message from the Editor. [Page 2 \(click here\)](#)

Teachers

Rogelio Garcia-Contreras: [The Most Beautiful Sport in the World](#)



Have you ever wondered why people all over the world love soccer so much? Read the commentary by Rogelio Garcia-Contreras, and you'll understand. [Page 3 \(click here\)](#)

Learners

Metchn Anne Lohoues: [Côte d'Ivoire, Land of Hope](#)



Côte d'Ivoire, a country on the west coast of "Mama Africa" recently teetered on the brink of a civil war. Find out what this meant to Anne Lohoues, a native of Abidjan. [Page 8 \(click here\)](#)

Graduates

Adam Gibson: [Houston Has Potential - Let's Realize It!](#)



Adam Gibson believes that Houston is a world-class city which has sold itself short. He offers Mayor Annise Parker advice on how to change this. [Page 14 \(click here\)](#)

Class Notes

Graduates of the Center for International Studies report on their plans and success stories. [Page 21 \(click here\)](#)

Friends

Fr. Donald Nesti: [Grounded in Faith yet Open to the World](#)



Is it possible to be committed to a faith tradition while embracing those whose understanding of the divine differs? See what Father Nesti has to say. [Page 22 \(click here\)](#)

Welcome

Welcome Message from the Editor

-- [Click here to return to cover page](#)

Dear Friends of the Center for International Studies:

The spring semester is almost at an end. Our seniors wrote their theses, presented their work both at the annual convention of the Southwestern International Studies Association and at the University of St. Thomas Research Symposium and are looking forward to commencement.



The student leaders of MicroCredit flew to Turkey, where they explored possibilities for new investments, and they were honored at the Clinton Global Initiative (University).

Dr. P-C (whom some know better as Linda Pett-Conklin) completed her year as department chair. We thank her for stepping forward and leading us after the passing of our dear colleague, Gustavo Wensjoe. In the fall, Hans Stockton will preside over our department.

Thank you all for your support in a time of transition, and please enjoy the ideas that you will find in this issue of *Connections*.

Nivien Saleh, Ph.D.
Center for International Studies
University of St. Thomas
Houston, Texas
713-525-3530
www.stthom.edu/cisconnections

Teachers

Rogelio Garcia-Contreras: The Most Beautiful Sport in the World

Rogelio Garcia-Contreras is a native of Mexico. He completed both his Master of Arts and his Ph.D. in international studies at the University of Denver. Since fall 2006, he has been an assistant professor at the Center for International Studies, where he advises the University's MicroCredit Program and teaches a wide range of courses, including the regional study of Latin America and international development. Those who know him can well attest to his passion for soccer, which he shares with his five-year-old son, Diego.

-- Essay by Rogelio García-Contreras with Nivien Saleh.

-- [Click here to return to cover page](#)



Famous Chilean sports commentator Luis Omar Tapia once described soccer as the most beautiful sport in the world. When I first read this description I thought, “He’s right!” Since then, however, I have come to believe that this lucid columnist fell short in his assessment. Soccer is so much more than just beautiful. It is divine.

The secret of soccer is its ability to bring people together, transcending ethnicity, economic status or ideological affiliation. How does it accomplish that? By celebrating a life that is simpler and more human than the dogmatic consumerism that the North American discourse propagates throughout the world. Soccer contains few rules (only as many as are needed for the enjoyment of an organized game). It is authentically democratic, economically accessible, humanly imperfect and unjust, athletically demanding, and socially controversial.

Teachers

To those who love the sport and also participate in a faith tradition, soccer is a spiritual experience. Religions frequently contain rituals that make God seem distant and untouchable. Soccer is different. While it does contain rituals, it manifests itself on the field in the here and now. It gives its followers many opportunities to witness divinity within the human existence. Every time a mortal overcomes all obstacles and, with a hint of luck, ability or divine intervention, gets possession of the ball and scores a goal, fans are reminded that there is something out there that is stronger and larger than they.

Everything the collective can imagine

For a true soccer lover - and this can be either an active player or a spectator-*aficionado* - the goal represents everything the collective wants and can imagine. Past and future melt together during that brief instant that connects a shot with the net, the ball with the goal line. In that very moment, those who strive for the goal have the potential of casting off their finite temporality and becoming eternal manifestations of the divine will. Otherwise, how could we explain that goal that Brazil's No. 10, "King" Pelé, scored against Italy in the final game of the 1970 World Cup? In his book, *Sueños de fútbol* (Dreams of Soccer), Jorge Valdano, the current director of Real Madrid, explains what happened that day: The score was 0-0. Positioned in Italy's end zone, Brazil's Roberto Rivelino obtained possession of the ball, then shot a high pass paralleling Italy's goal line. Seeing the ball come towards him at high speed, Pelé jumped up, then descended from the heavens. Suspended from a celestial chord, he reached the ball with his forehead and headed it past Italy's goalie into the net, setting the score to 1-0 and putting Brazil on track to win the cup.

The mythical game took place in Mexico City. It taught the local residents that God not only had children but also favorite places and that their city was one of them. 16 years later, God chose Mexico City for yet another manifestation.

Diego Maradona, the unlikely star

Born in Lanus, just south of Buenos Aires, Diego Maradona had been a modest kid, too robust to be an athlete and too short to be taken seriously. Then he turned out to be one of the most talented soccer players the world had ever seen. During the 1986 World Cup, he captained Argentina's national team and led it into

Teachers

the quarter final against England. On a hot June day more than 100,000 fans crowded the Azteca stadium, watching intently.

Their patience was rewarded. Maradona bestowed upon the world a taste of the eternal and the supernatural, first like Satan remitting his fans to divine will in order to eclipse his misdeeds, and then like God dribbling the ball as his exclusive right. The score was still 0-0 when Maradona made inroads into England's rearguard and then scored two goals of which the second is easily the most extraordinary and formidable goal in the history of the sport. Here's how FIFA, the International Federation of Football Associations, describes it,

Never one to give up on a lost cause, Maradona continued his run, leapt up and punched the ball over Shilton who had come dashing from his line . . . The England players protested in vain as Tunisian referee Ali Bennaceur awarded the goal, convinced Maradona had got his head to the ball.

The 'hand of God', as Maradona himself called it, unquestionably turned the game. However, as if to make amends, Diego then went on to score what is often described as the 'goal of the century'. There were 55 minutes on the clock when he won the ball in his own half, escaping the attentions of Beardsley and Peter Reid, and set off into England territory. The 115,000 fans at the Azteca stadium looked on in a trance as he headed towards goal, gliding past first Butcher and then Fenwick before rounding Shilton to make it 2-0. It was a goal in a million by a football genius.¹

Yes, ever since Pelé's triumph, the No. 10 looks good only if it is printed in green on a yellow jersey. Maradona's goal involved the hand of God, and soccer is so much more than a beautiful sport: It is the very manifestation of passion and eternity.

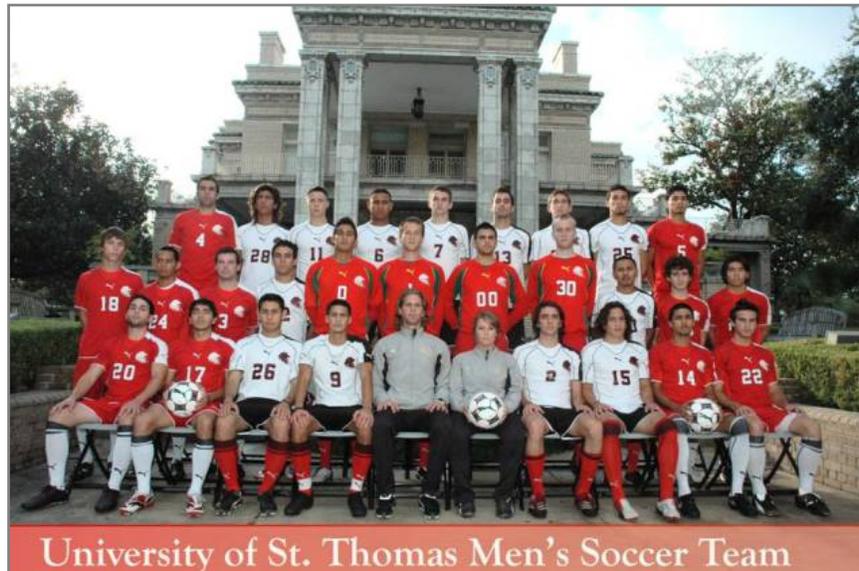
A promise waiting for its fulfillment

Still, the goal is magnificent not because its specific manifestations have obtained mythical status. What makes it so wonderful is its quality as a promise that is *waiting* to be fulfilled. This is true not only for the well-televised games that pit national teams against one another. It also applies to the ingenious goals that millions of

¹ FIFA, n.d. Classic Football: Maradona's brace buries England. Retrieved on March 15, 2010. Two view, click [here](#).

Teachers

children around the world try to score for their friends between two rocks, two trees or in front of a wall where the goalmouth exists merely in the participants' imagination.



Soccer is so extraordinary because the promise of the goal is as sacred as the goal itself: a kick to the post, a blocked shot, incomplete dribbling, a terrific cut off; all these actions are vivid examples of frustrated efforts to fulfill the promise. Even though frustrated, these attempts are rightful candidates for eternity, and some even become eternity. Once again, Pelé serves as an example. It happened during the semi-final game of the 1970 World Cup in Mexico.

Brazil faced Uruguay. Pelé moved into the end zone; from midfield one of the legendary Brazilian players kicked the ball in his direction, past the Uruguayan defense. In a panic, Uruguay's goalkeeper left his post to intercept the ball. Who would arrive first? No one! Pelé decided it was better to let the ball continue its path and with a masterful feint he ran away from it and left the goalkeeper who followed him sliding through the grass. Now reaching the ball became imperative. The angle of the shot dissipated, Pelé's energy was exhausted, but he made a superhuman effort and, falling, with a half turn, took a shot at the unguarded goal...SO CLOSE!!!

Failures like this may be the greatest quality of this extraordinary sport, which demands both outstanding athletic skills and phenomenal association abilities. Soccer openly reflects the dialectical logic of the human soul and the structure of a society full of

Teachers

challenges, vices and obstacles. In fact, in its ultimate form, soccer recreates the ephemeral logic of life. It can be found in a break by Brazil's Garrincha, a sweep by Germany's "Kaiser" Franz Beckenbauer, a shot by Real Madrid's Alfredo di Stéfano, a pass from France's Michel Platini, a soar of Russia's Lev Yashin, or the moves and countermoves of many unnamed amateur players.

That's why I say, "Long live football - *real* football!" □

-- [Click here to return to cover page](#)

View the soccer episodes described in this feature on YouTube:

Episode 1: Pelé

- World Cup 1970, final, Brazil vs. Italy. To see Pelé score his goal click [here](#).

Episode 2: Diego Maradona

- World Cup 1986, quarter final, Argentina vs. England. To see Maradona's goal, click [here](#).

Episode 1: Pelé

- World Cup 1970, semi-final, Brazil vs. Uruguay. To view Pelé miss the goal by a narrow margin, click [here](#).

Learn about soccer at the University of St. Thomas and in Houston:

The University of St. Thomas

- St. Thomas has a men's soccer team. [Click here for more information](#).

The Houston Dynamo

- In the city of Houston, we have an excellent professional soccer team, the Houston Dynamo. Our fans are as passionate as Rogelio Garcia-Contreras and firmly believe that one day they will experience the spiritual bliss of having players who live in myth with Pelé and Maradona. [Click here for more information](#).

Learners

Metchn Anne Lohoues: Côte d'Ivoire, Land of Hope

A citizen of Côte d'Ivoire, Metchn Anne Lohoues grew up in the city of Abidjan. For her college education, she came to the United States and enrolled at Houston Community College. In 2008, she graduated summa cum laude with an Associate of Arts degree. Then she transferred to the University of St. Thomas, where she has been working towards her Bachelor of Arts in International Studies. Anne is a member of Phi Theta Kappa.

-- Essay by Metchn Anne Lohoues.

-- [Click here to return to cover page](#)



I was born in Côte d'Ivoire or, as English-speaking people call it, Ivory Coast. Geographically, Côte d'Ivoire is about the size of Oklahoma. Surrounded by Liberia, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso and Ghana, it sits on the west coast of Mama Africa, its arched bottom bordered by the waters of the Atlantic. One of the leading producers of coffee in the world and ranked third for cocoa, Côte d'Ivoire has also vast amounts of gold, diamond, bauxite, steel, oil, palm oil and cotton. After Ivoirians gained their independence from France in 1960, they converted these resources into economic growth. Thanks to President Félix Houphouët-Boigny, who led the nation from 1960 to his death in 1993, Côte d'Ivoire experienced decades of political stability. Combined economic growth and stability earned it the nickname "Miracle of Africa." Many other African nations strove to emulate it, some more successfully than others.

Sadly, these calm times came to an end when the president passed away.

Learners

Hospitability

If I were to summarize the most remarkable features of my home land, I would point to its openness and hospitability. Under Houphouët-Boigny, many people from outside flocked to Côte d'Ivoire because they felt they could realize their aspirations in its burgeoning agricultural sector. This wave of immigration has added 5 million non-Ivoirians to the country's native population of 12 million. Ivoirians welcomed these immigrants, who enriched our society culturally and economically, with open arms and offered land to those ready to cultivate it.

Abidjan

I grew up in Abidjan, a city in the south that sits on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean. The locals lovingly refer to it as “Petit Paris” or “little Paris,” because of the beautiful lights that illuminate its skyline. A true coastal city, Abidjan has a lagoon - a body of shallow salt water that is separated from the deep sea by a narrow sandbank. On the inland side of the lagoon are the city's magnificent mosque, a five-star intercontinental hotel and the *Palais de la Culture*, a cultural center where most concerts and cultural events are held. On the other side are the business district with its skyscrapers, the soccer stadium, and Abidjan's architectural masterpiece, St. Paul's Cathedral. Two large bridges and bus boats connect the two sides of the lagoon.



Côte d'Ivoire has 65 ethnicities. They fall into six tribes, the Akan, Dan, Voltaïque, Northern and Southern Mandé, and the Krous. I belong to the Akan and Dan tribes and speak both

Learners

Adioukrou and Gouro in addition to French, which is the nation's official language.

The life of my childhood was that of a comfortable middle class youngster. My father, Esmel Eugène 1st, was a charismatic doctor and generous provider. Together with my mother Rita-Marie, he raised 13 children, of which I was the youngest. He taught us to be humble and fear God. He also instilled in us a deep respect for education.

Our neighborhood was a safe place. Even though we were little, our parents allowed us to play outside as long as the sun was out. While we explored the streets, we befriended the door keepers of nearby houses who for the most part were immigrants from Burkina Faso or Mali. When we said hello to them, they returned the greeting with kindness. Even though their job was to keep an eye on their employer's house, they also looked out for us children.

Christmas

Whenever Christmas neared, Abidjan was in a state of excitement. Colorful lights dressed up the city, and Christmas carols floated through the shopping malls. In a very short span of time, stores sold out their manger figurines, Christmas trees and fire crackers, not to mention the small breads in the shape of Santa Claus.

Like all the other locals, my family greeted the holidays with anticipation. My two elder sisters, Emmanuella and Immaculée, took me to the home of our Guinean friends, where we debated how to best catch a glimpse of Santa Claus and get him to give us exactly what we wanted. Our scurrilous conversations lasted for hours, until an older sibling came to fetch us.

On Christmas Eve, the Lohoues family attended Mass. Afterwards, we gathered around a dinner table laden with delicious seasonal dishes. While their scents tickled our noses, my father said a blessing. Then we began to eat. Putting small bits of food in my mouth, I thought about the Santa-trap that my sisters and I had developed. Surely, this time we would get to see him!

Learners

New Year's Day

Christmas always went by much too quickly. But luckily we had another celebration to which we could look forward: New Year's Day. At noon of January 1, my father said his blessing. Then we ate a lovely meal and drank home-made ginger juice as well as sweetened hibiscus tea. It was a day of relaxation, during which we listened to music, exchanged phone calls with family friends, and welcomed the newlyborn year. When the night fell, we invited friends from Guinea and Burkina Faso who lit firecrackers with us and watched their sparks disappear into the dark sky.

Crisis

The first two lines of *L'Abidjanaise*, the national anthem of Côte d'Ivoire, say, "I greet you, Land of Hope, land of hospitality." The hope of which this song speaks is one for a better, prosperous, and peaceful future, one in which all those who were born in the country or migrated to it can better themselves economically. This sense of hope is at the heart of Ivoirian national identity. And since on New Year's Day, all residents of the country focus their attention on this hope, I believe that New Year's Day is a very Ivoirian celebration.

Alas, the passing of Houphouët-Boigny and an international recession that drove down prices for Ivoirian coffee and cocoa shattered the sense of hope that held the country together, and the economic downturn increased ethnic tensions. In September of 2002, a group of disgruntled military officers raised their arms against state facilities in Abidjan, Bouake, and Korhogo. The government subsequently regained control over the south of the country; but the rebels managed to assert their authority over the north. For the next few years, Côte d'Ivoire teetered on the brink of a full-blown civil war.

Compared to the national income of European or North American nations, that of Côte d'Ivoire is low. This is why this small country so rarely makes the headlines of world news. It is thus not surprising that most people living outside of Africa were completely unaware that rebellion had struck Côte d'Ivoire. To those who did notice, the uprising was little more than a flash of violence as they appear on television screens on a daily basis. Outsiders could simply end their exposure to the conflict by changing the channel. For me, this was impossible.

Learners

Turmoil consumed my country, the place in the world of which I was fondest. After the media announced the mutiny of the soldiers, the nation was put under curfew. Fire crackers were banned, and so were clothes with military prints. It may sound trite, but without those firecrackers holidays were not the same. In addition, the north of the country had been seized by the governments' opponents, and people from the north seeking refuge had to trek to refugee camps in the south.

“What has happened to our land?” I asked myself. “What has become of this society which once accepted anyone who arrived here in search of a better life on this rich soil? Will the African Miracle be engulfed in the fire of strife? Can migrants still feel welcome now that they are facing the fractures of war?” These questions frightened me. In search for an answer I turned to my father, whose faith in God was unshakable.

The peace accord

In 2006, I left Côte d'Ivoire to study in the United States: first at the Houston Community College, then at the University of St. Thomas. A year later, I received a call from my father. He said: “The country is at peace now.” The leaders of the conflicting parties had at long last signed a peace agreement that declared the end of the crisis.

For Christmas 2008, I returned home. I was blissful when I saw immigrants who had been such an important part of my childhood: Mr. Amidou, the tailor from Burkina Faso and Mr. Diallo, the baker from Guinea who always gave my sisters and me lollipops as presents. When I visited M'man, the Burkinabé grocer, a small girl in a colorful ruffle dress darted out of the store and towards me. Puzzled, I look at M'man. She smiled and said, “Anne, let me introduce you to my granddaughter.” I was exhilarated. Seeing these old and new friends felt so good. They could easily have packed their belongings and left the strife-ridden country. Instead, they stuck out the crisis and held on to the roots they had grown in Côte d'Ivoire's fertile soil. For them, Côte d'Ivoire continues to be a land of hope, the tensions of the previous years notwithstanding.

Road to recovery

From what I can tell, the country is on its way to total recovery. My hope is that the crisis was transitory, that peace is here to

Learners

stay, and that Côte d'Ivoire can once again return to being a beacon that stands for prosperity, hospitality, and happiness.

My 2008 visit to Abidjan lasted only a few weeks. Once again we celebrated Christmas with firecrackers and invited the immigrant children to our home, where they congregated around the Christmas tree. After the meal, they danced and received gifts, and the happiness in their eyes was unmistakable. For me, it was the best Christmas of my life.



When it was time to leave, my parents brought me back to the airport. After boarding the plane and locating my seat, I looked out of the window. Only a short distance from the plane stood my father, smiling and waving goodbye.

The engines kicked in, the aircraft accelerated, then it lifted me into the night sky. Looking down, I could see Abidjan and its lights. The sight reminded me of a vast sea of candles that slowly faded from view. At last, I could feel the sense of peace that this city had tried to regain for so long. With a sigh, I pulled the shade down, covered myself with a blanket and thanked God for the blessings He had bestowed upon me and the Land of Hope.□

-- [Click here to return to cover page](#)

Graduates

Adam Gibson: Houston Has Potential – Let’s Realize It!

Adam Gibson, who received his Bachelor of Arts in International Studies in 2000, holds a Juris Doctorate from South Texas College of Law. During his studies, Adam interned in both the Mayor’s Office of International Business Development and the Houston Airport System’s Office of International Economic Development. After serving as Development Director of the Bilateral US-Arab Chamber of Commerce, Adam became the International Business Manager and ultimately Vice President of International Business for the Greater Houston Partnership. Currently, he is Director of Business Development for Rottet Studio, an international architecture and design firm headquartered in Houston.



-- Essay by Adam Gibson.

-- [Click here to return to cover page](#)

When Houstonians meet at parties, their conversations inevitably touch on the city’s reputation, and a few will say, “Let’s face it. The world still thinks we’re a cow town.” I have grown up, studied and worked in Houston. I have seen this city evolve and am as proud of it as anyone. But I know it has an image problem, which hurts us economically. Luckily, I have some ideas on how to remedy the situation. The answer lies in business development.

What does Houston have to offer?

Let’s take stock of what we have. Not only is Houston the global capital of the energy industry, but it also has a world-class medical center, top-of-the-line professional sporting arenas, a booming global sea port, a fast-growing airport, an infrastructure of rail and trucking lines. Together with our geographic location in the cen-

Graduates

ter of the country, these features combine to make Houston one of the most attractive global business hubs in North America.

Houston is also one of the most enticing cities in the world for entrepreneurs. We offer the lowest market entry cost for a city of our size, no state income taxes and no zoning – which means that in this city, the “American Dream” is more possible than anywhere else.

Houston features the second largest theater district in the U.S. (after Broadway), the most contiguous green space of any American city of its size, a broad variety of ethnic restaurants, world-class retail shopping and a surprisingly affordable housing market. Quality of life in this neck of the woods is high.

In addition, this city is a model of ethnic tolerance. As those who have listened to Professor Steven Klineberg of Rice University know,² Houston is at the cusp of the demographic revolution that is turning America into a majority minority nation, and it models how such a transition can be accomplished with minimal friction.

All these features make Houston an international city. Unfortunately, few people know this.

Where have things gone wrong?

In the United States, city promotion tends to be the responsibility of local business communities, who fulfill this responsibility by chartering chambers of commerce, which in turn market their cities to investors, tourists, convention planners, laborers and college graduates. Compared to this trend, Houston’s business community has a poor record in promoting the city internationally.

Where have things gone wrong? To find out, let us evaluate our existing efforts. For that, some historical background is necessary. In 1928, the Houston World Trade Association came into being. It was a major reputation builder for Houston, which, at that time, had much less to offer than it does now. In addition, there were the Houston Chamber of Commerce and the Houston Economic Development Council. The Council focused on economic

² Professor Klineberg gave a lecture at the University of St. Thomas in 2008, which was hosted by the Center for International Studies. For more information about Professor Klineberg, [click here](#).

Graduates

diversification – attracting new industries and companies to Houston. The Chamber supported the existing businesses in the city and promoted our regional economy by helping these companies expand and grow.

In 1989, these three entities merged to form the Greater Houston Partnership.³ The new organization set a goal of diversifying Houston’s economy so that we would survive the next downturn. By many standards, it was successful – today, only 40 percent of the city’s jobs are tied to the energy industry compared to 85 percent in the late 1980s.

Although valuable, these efforts lacked a comprehensive, focused initiative to change the image of the city as it transitioned from a simple oil town to a complex multi-sector economy. Making matters worse, the Greater Houston Partnership, in 2005, developed a strategic plan that shifted the organization’s primary focus to economic development, i.e., creating new jobs and attracting new companies to Houston. In implementation of the plan, the Partnership cut back on many of the trade and business promotion functions that it once fulfilled. For example, it reduced its number of business-to-business programs, and it organized inbound and outbound business delegations less and less often, thereby reducing the possibilities that Houston companies have to meet with potential international business partners.

The cost of failure

This policy shift had immediate costs. Both the Houston Airport System and the Port of Houston had been looking to Greater Houston Partnership for leadership, coordination and integration. After 2005, this was no longer forthcoming, and the two infrastructure operators increased the number of their own outreach efforts. The Houston Airport System is now singularly focused on expanding passenger and cargo air service. The Port of Houston seeks to increase trade volumes by sea. There is little coordination between these two organizations, even though both pursue the same goal: bringing international business traffic to Houston.

A second effect of the Partnership’s lull in trade promotion activities is that numerous bilateral trade associations and chambers of commerce have sprung up. Today there are close to 31 international and bilateral chambers of commerce in Houston. This has

³ The Greater Houston Partnership [can be found by clicking here](#).

Graduates

some benefit: specialized associations can cultivate intimate relations with a small segment of potential investors that they know very well. But the cost has been a fragmentation of trade promotion efforts. Surrounded by a sea of competitors, the numerous specialized business organizations struggle for survival. Their focus is set on defining their “turf” and fighting for limited financial resources. Cooperation is rare. Consequently, the business community is left with many diluted opportunities rather than a focused, cohesive route to success in the global market.

Houstonians must understand that if we market the city with the same individualistic entrepreneurial zeal that we apply to building a business, we will fail. What we need is a cohesive message, a strategic approach and consolidated voice.

Learning from others

We should learn from others who have been successful. The Spanish government, for example, has implemented a well-planned and cohesive strategy to support small businesses and attract foreign investment. The business associations that participate in these efforts work in tandem and don’t step on each other’s toes. All organizations have a common goal of increasing the economic climate in a country that has for decades been plagued by high unemployment and a weak currency. The British government has also done an exemplary job at promoting foreign direct investment. UK Trade & Investment, which according to its own website brings together the work of the Foreign Office and the Department for Business, is not only a great asset for anyone seeking to do business in the British Isles; it also produces significant economic studies and approaches the business of promotion with an expertise that reflects London’s status as a global financial center.

We need leadership

Spain and Britain have something that is lacking in Houston: recognized leadership and clearly defined roles.

Our business community benefits from the expansion of international air cargo and passenger services, and it welcomes the recent decisions of Singapore, Emirates and Qatar Airways to increase their presence in Houston. We must, however, be cognizant that those who supply that infrastructure need assurance that it will be fully utilized and yield returns. So if we seek to attract even more infrastructure investment, we must offer a vision for driving business

Graduates

across the routes that the new investments establish. In addition, if we want companies to ship their goods through our ports, we have to provide the business support critical for their success. Economic development and business development should therefore go hand-in-hand.



All this requires a leader with a big vision, someone who has the benefit of support from the business community, the Houston Airport System and the Port.

Luckily, Houston has one of the strongest mayoral governments in the United States, and this can be an enormous asset for unified development. Bill White, the last mayor, realized this and took several important steps in the right direction. He examined the different aspects of city life and attempted to bring people together for a common goal. He conducted several conference calls with organization leaders engaged in international business and economic development with the aim of coordinating their efforts.

Under Mayor White, the Houston Airport System - a department of the City of Houston - became actively engaged in international business promotion. It began to coordinate its activities with the Greater Houston Partnership, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Texas Medical Center and various regional trade and eco-

Graduates

conomic development organizations. The airport also engaged in several high-level coordination efforts. Among others, the airport has worked with Federal agencies on behalf of Houston's government and the city's business community to address travel and visa issues that directly affect international business.

A task for the mayor

As the new mayor of Houston, Annise Parker can expand the role that the previous mayor began to carve out, provided she has a clear vision for synergy and focused international development initiatives.⁴ She will need to convince the Port, Airport, the Greater Houston Partnership, Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau and various trade promotion groups and chambers of commerce that working together enhances the future for all of us and secures our place in the new global economy.

Importantly, she will need to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the various organizations that are involved in international business promotion. As an integrative force, she will review the various initiatives that are underway and tell the various executing business associations, "If you all plan to go to Shanghai with the aim of promoting Houston, then why don't we all go there at the same time with one message, thereby strengthening our effect rather than going there one by one and appearing ineffective?" No one organization has the staff, financial resources or strength to handle this job on its own. But if the mayor can make them pool their resources and skills, success will follow.

The benefits of coordination

A strategic approach on all levels would make a significant difference for Houston. The stakeholders would generate a stronger message and present it in a more cost-effective way. There would be concrete payoffs for tourism, conventions, air and sea cargo and passenger traffic. If managers of a foreign airline hear a presentation from the Houston Airport System and see the business community at the table, they will become confident that their infrastructure will be used. If a foreign company knows that Houston has a strong, organized network of small businesses that is ready to use their products, perform value-added manufacturing or distribute their goods across the U.S., it will be more inclined to ship its goods via Houston rather than New Orleans.

⁴ You can find the Houston Mayor's Office by [clicking here](#).

Graduates

The Greater Houston Partnership will convince companies to relocate to Houston if it can show that the Convention and Visitors Bureau pursues tourism from the same region and the port recruits shipping lines that will carry companies' products to their new Houston headquarters.

With a cohesive message, Houstonians can increase awareness among the national and international public, especially when they deliver that message simultaneously to all segments of their target audience: business, industry, airlines, travel. Quickly, the audience will see Houston everywhere. And rather than thinking of the city solely as a business or shopping destination, they will learn that Houston is a complete package. □

-- [Click here to return to cover page](#)

Graduates

Class Notes

-- [Click here to return to cover page](#)

We asked our graduates to submit their class notes. See below what they have had to say.

Claudia Vidales Espinosa (BA, International Studies 2008)

Claudia is a graduate student at UC San Diego, where she will complete her MA in Pacific and International Affairs by June 2011. In 2009, she completed an internship in transfer pricing with Chévez, Ruíz, Zamarripa, y Cía, a consulting firm in Mexico City, and worked as an analyst for the intelligence service Mexico Watch. At UC San Diego, she is involved in the Baja Project, a student-run consultancy that promotes sustainable development in the Mexican fishing village of El Barril.



David D. Ortiz (BA, International Studies and Business Administration 2005)

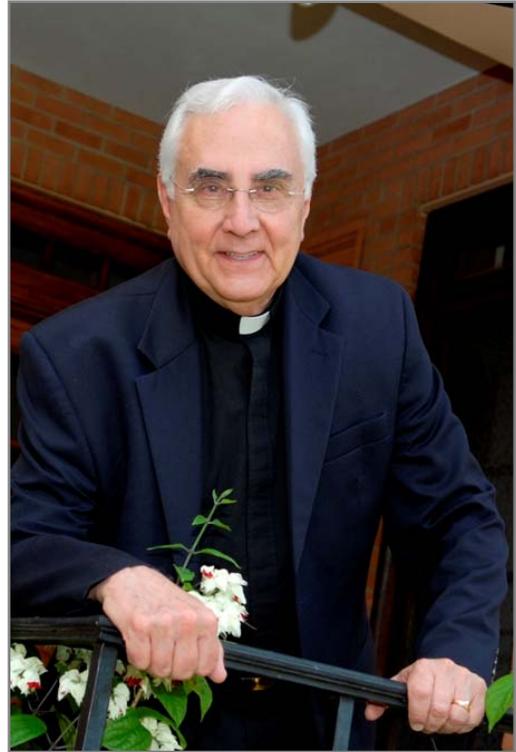
While at the University of St. Thomas, David did a joint major in International Studies and Business Administration. After graduation, he worked for Catholic Charities and then for the City of Houston Mayor's Office of International Affairs and Development. Subsequently, Mr. Ortiz was accepted into the US Army Warrant Officer Aviation Program, where he will fly the OH-58 Kiowa Warrior. He recently wed Kira Ortiz. □

-- [Click here to return to cover page](#)

Friends

Fr. Donald Nesti: Grounded in Faith yet Open to the World

Donald Nesti, CSSp, is an ordained member of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit with university degrees from St. Mary's Seminary in Norwalk and the University of Pittsburgh. At the Gregorian University in Rome, he received a doctorate of divinity. He taught at Duquesne University and from 1980 to 1988 served as the university's president. Currently, he directs the Center for Faith and Culture at the University of St. Thomas. In this role, Fr. Nesti has pursued interfaith dialogue, among others by organizing, in 2008, the Archbishop Joseph A. Fiorenza Inter-religious Dialogue Symposium, which brought together representatives of Catholicism, Judaism and Islam.



-- Interview by Nivien Saleh.

-- [Click here to return to cover page](#)

Connections: What are your family origins?

Fr. Nesti: All my grandparents were poor immigrants, who came from Italy: on my father's side from Tuscany, on my mother's side from the Abruzzi. They made the journey into Ellis Island, then settled in the Pittsburgh area, where I was born in the 1930s.

On my mother's side, my grandparents raised nine children, and on my father's side six. My maternal grandmother had a great influence on me. She was a very balanced woman. Her house was the hub where all my cousins came together. Yes, I had a large extended family, and it was a wonderful thing.

Friends

I felt welcome in the community where we lived. Even though the white Anglo-Saxon Protestants in the area had a living standard quite beyond ours, I never experienced prejudice.

Early predispositions

Connections: Were there experiences in your early life that moved you toward priesthood?

Fr. Nesti: There were two character traits that predisposed me to become who I am now. The first trait was a strong sense of God. As early as four years of age, I began to search for God in everything I saw. It was simply part of my being and not instilled in me by my parents, who were traditional Catholics. This sense of the divine persisted even as I passed through the public educational system - first a public high school and then the University of Pittsburgh.

My second trait was openness to people. I was very interested in the way people lived, and for that purpose, it did not matter where they came from or what their religious background was. My closest childhood friend was the son of a Presbyterian minister. The Methodist Church enlisted me in their Boy Scout troop, and I had very dear Jewish friends. Individuals who brought people together easily drew me into their orbit, because they allowed me to cross boundaries and enter into the thought world of others.

Entering the priesthood

Connections: You then became a priest and joined the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. How did you select that order?

Fr. Nesti: The Congregation of the Holy Spirit is a missionary congregation. It seeks to relate the love of the gospel and God, who is love, to all peoples of the world. The order presumes that God's spirit reaches beyond the Catholic Church into every culture and faith tradition on earth. So when members of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit enter a non-Christian culture, they wait and listen to how the Spirit of God is working there. Then they enter into dialogue with the Spirit of God as it is at work in the people.

Now, did Christians properly implement God's mission throughout the history of Christianity? No, there were religious wars and abuses of power. But these have to be understood as the distortions of sin, and they do not change the fact that God is love.

Friends

When I enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh, I majored in American history. Then I became interested in philosophy, Latin and Greek. Given my original predisposition towards the Divine, this logically led me to think about entering the seminary. At the end of my third year in the university I began investigating the diocesan priesthood and religious orders. I was 21 when I responded to my vocation.

That summer, it just so happened that a priest was home on vacation in our parish. After attending his Mass, I began a conversation with him, and he inquired, "Are you interested in the priesthood?" I replied that I was, so he suggested that I join his order. I asked, "Who are you?" He explained, "We are the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. But don't worry about that for now. Have your bags packed in the morning, wait by the train, and we'll go." The next morning a young Donald Nesti stood at the train station with a suitcase by his side. I was excited about finishing my undergraduate studies in the seminary and then moving on to study philosophy for two years before entering the novitiate.

As I look back on the event in retrospect, it is clear to me that it was exactly what God wanted me to do, because He put me a Congregation which would make me travel all over the world, encounter many cultures, be in dialogue with different religions, learn from them and constantly have a sense of the Divine Spirit working throughout creation.

In 1963, at age 27, I was ordained. Then I was sent to the Gregorian University in Rome to complete my doctoral studies in Ecumenical Theology.

A personal look at Vatican II

Connections: What was it like to be in Rome?

Fr. Nesti: It was an exciting time. People from every continent studied at my university. Moreover, during my stay there, the Second Vatican Council took place. It was a watershed moment for the Catholic Church.

In 1958, Pope Pius XII died. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, who had been nuncio (ambassador) to Turkey, then France, and later the Cardinal Patriarch of Venice, was elected to succeed him. He chose John XXIII as his reign name. Many thought of him as a

Friends

“little fat man” who would neither last long nor have great influence. And yet, his impact was enormous. He convened the Second Vatican Council.

2,500 bishops from just about every country of the world attended. They sought to answer questions about the Church’s self-understanding and identity and its relationship with the world. For the first time the Church in council articulated how it viewed its association with the other two Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Islam. The results of their meditation were summarized in the watershed document, *Nostra Aetate*. Another document, *The Church in the Contemporary World*, explained how the Church is to relate the Christian worldview to economics, politics, the family, education, and other areas of life.

Vatican II was a remarkable, remarkable moment in the history of the faith. I was there when the Council's documents were promulgated. From my station in Rome, the overwhelming joy of the whole Church was palpable.

The implementation of the Council proved more difficult. There were abuses, and some people pursued their own tangents as they interpreted the guidance that Vatican II gave them. In the United States, things were further complicated by the cultural upheaval that marked the public sphere and found expression in the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, and the peace movement.

Challenged by students

Connections: What did you do once your education in Rome was completed?

Fr. Nesti: In 1971, after graduating with a theology doctorate, I was sent to teach at Duquesne University, which had been founded by the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. It was the first time that I entered a classroom as a professor. Deep down I trembled, daunted by the challenge. Students were not happy, because they had to take this required course in theology but could not see the need for it. In an era in which so much new was happening - our country was caught up in the Vietnam conflict, and the civil rights movement was gaining steam - a sense of relativism spread throughout society, and students considered the course an old hat.

Friends

So I had to walk into this classroom and teach these young men and women Christianity. After sweating for a while, I at last decided, “I will do what the Congregation of the Holy Spirit has taught me.” This helped me, and my opening remarks to the students were, “Tell me where you are, what your questions are. Tell me who you think you are or what questions you have about that. And we’ll start there.”

That is how we began, and out of this experience, I developed a course called “The Christian Understanding of the Human Person.” Well, you can’t understand the human person if you don’t first ask a number of questions about God. And you can’t ask questions about God without asking other questions about the world. So, this course examined where Jesus figured into our daily affairs and what implications the Christian faith offered for living a moral life.

One student in this course challenged me, “I don’t believe any of that junk you’re teaching.” So I invited him to come by my office. He came, and I said, “In class you stated that everything is relative, that there is no moral standard out there. Do you really believe that?” He said with conviction, “Oh yes, absolutely.” So I told him, “In the top drawer of my desk I have a revolver, and I intend to shoot you. Can I do that?” He replied, “No, because it hurts me.” I followed up, “How much do we do that hurts other people? And what tells us whether or not we may take these hurtful actions? Are we guided by a cold moralism or the love that we have in us? And if our action should be guided by love, how are we to understand love? Is it pornography and sex or something else? If you want to go with the view of Jesus, he gives you very clear advice, saying, “There is only one commandment: That you love each other as I love you.”

These were my beginnings as a college professor.

Presiding over Duquesne University

Connections: You later served as president of the university. Can you describe some of the important ideas that you developed during your tenure?

Fr. Nesti: Drawing on the lessons from the classroom, I asked myself what it meant to be a Catholic university. Did it mean that we had to have certain courses? No. What it meant was that you had to approach all courses in a distinct way. For example, as a professor of international studies, you would ponder how you might integrate a perspective of faith as you look at different cultures, polit-

Friends

ical systems, and international organizations. And then you would ask where we all are going as people of one world.

My last act at Duquesne University was to coordinate a conference for presidents of Catholic universities and colleges. This was before *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* - Pope John Paul II's statement on higher education - came out. People wanted to know what it meant to be a Catholic university. I explained, "The Catholic university is a liminal space in which the world and faith meet. It is the place where people can freely engage faith and reason in relationship with all aspects of existence. While being Catholic, the university is not identical with the Church. But the Catholic university has to permit its faculty to explore the world in an academic way, keeping faith, respecting faith, not denigrating it, and not excluding it from the dialogue."

The Center for Faith and Culture

Connections: After your time at Duquesne, you came to the University of St. Thomas, where you founded the Center for Faith and Culture.⁵ Can you explain how one led to the other?

Fr. Nesti: The idea of the university as liminal space that I had developed at Duquesne means that there should be room - for those who choose it - to investigate the relationship between faith and culture. This includes communicating with non-Christians about their approach to this issue. If I, for example, went to Yemen, I might dress like a Yemeni, sit down with the people and learn. I would ask them, "How do you look at things? What do you see?" Wherever you go on the face of the earth - whether to the Maasai in Africa or to a Muslim country in the Middle East - people in their way of life will have something to say about God: Whether he exists or doesn't exist, what it means to be human and how we have to behave, and what the world is. And at a Catholic university you should have the opportunity to explore those questions.

So one day, my superior asked me to move to Houston or San Antonio. There I would investigate the possibilities for creating a center on the relationship between faith and culture. I came to Houston and asked Dr. McFadden - at the time the president of the University of St. Thomas -, Dr. Williams - the vice president for academic affairs -, and Bishop Joseph Fiorenza if they would be in-

⁵ Find the Center for Faith and Culture by [clicking here](#).

Friends

terested in this kind of center at the University of St. Thomas. They said yes.

My greatest challenge lay ahead. I had to be patient as I watched the Center for Faith and Culture grow. Now, 15 years later, we have finally launched a new graduate program for faith and culture.

Dialogue with Christians, Jews and Muslims

Connections: What noteworthy experiences have you had in the context of your work at the center?

Fr. Nesti: One of my greatest experiences has been watching my students. When they have had the opportunity to look at the basis of the culture and understand what it means to be an American, they are much more conscious as they carry their faith into their daily, civic lives, bring the Catholic voice to the dialogue and contribute their share to this country. My students come from various walks of life - I have had those who worked towards their Master's of Arts in Theology, Master's of Arts in Pastoral Studies and Master's of Divinity. These include lay people, seminarians, men, women, professionals.



One of my favorite courses focuses specifically on Christian spirituality. It incorporates the great historical themes of Christian spirituality over a period more than 2,000 years of lived experience

Friends

and seeks to relate them to the contemporary context. The challenge inherent in the spiritual journey is the same today as it has been since the time of Christ: How do we live in union with God in practice of everyday life? What does it mean to live as a Christian in today's context?

Another exciting thing is that besides Catholics, there have been other Christians, Jews, and Muslims who enrolled in my courses. In addition, I have enjoyed working with Turkish Muslims here in Houston. They readily integrated me into their community and asked me to serve on the board of their Institute for Interfaith Dialogue, which pursues - as the name suggests - dialogue among the world religions. Work with the Anti-Defamation League of the Jews has been enriching as well.

New worlds open up all the time. And as you delve ever more deeply into dialogue, you come to see commonalities with others. You cease to dwell on what divides, but focus on the oneness that brings us all together. This does not mean that you forget differences. These, too, must be discussed. We can do so because we have first built relationships based on trust.

The quest to learn from, and communicate with, all members of the human family, no matter how different they seem to be from us, is a central aspect of my life. For me, it is an essential component of a Catholic university where all seek to become people who are open to traversing frontiers. □

[Click here to return to cover page](#)