Diverse issues covered at the praxis forum

By MICHAEL GARAFALO

Students, who entered the Cabaret on Wednesday, April 25 from 4 p.m. to approximately 7 p.m., faced a collage of pictures of children from Calcutta. The pictures were consistent with what one might expect from an impoverished area. That is, until Senior Lauren Fitzpatrick, who coordinated the event with Senior Matthew Wilk, explained their background.

The photographs were not taken by students, but by the children of Calcutta. And what the pictures could not convey praxis students Sharon McDowell and Lindsay Zambraski explained during their presentation.

Presenters at Marist’s Occupy Public Praxis forum discussed a wide range of current global issues, including water cleanliness in Calcutta, living conditions in Haiti, the Occupy protests, a current internet privacy bill and even soup kitchen problems that are going on in our very own state.

Despite the wide range of topics, each and every presentation contained one common message: Ask questions. Every presenter urged the audience to do research and seek truth.

The presenters were diverse, and included Marist students and faculty, a Vassar student and students from Newburgh Free Academy among others. Multiple individuals were awarded with the Eleano Roosevelt Recognition award.

The Cabaret’s perimeter was bordered by numerous student posters and displays, which included relevant pictures, information and handouts.

The 17th annual forum was a special tribute to retiring Marist Professor Bruce Luske.

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Luke spoke about the important role of spirituality in relation to problem solving and said that ultimately, minor shifts in political power are insufficient for making progress.

“I call on all of us to stand together, to serve the common good,” he said.

Public praxis professor Peter-Racul said she hopes “that students take their learning at Marist out into the streets, into the arena, and inform public consciousness and humanize in the enormity of human suffering.”

For many students it was difficult to take a single event, which represented a culmination of work from at least an entire semester, and explain it in just a few words.

Junior Michael Draper said that praxis in general is about “seeing things from different perspectives.”

He believes that the course here at Marist provides students with information beyond the mass media and “brings a lot of attention” to pressing problems of this time.

Three musicians performed at the event. Senior Grace Andruszkiewicz, president of the Marist Singers, sang “Make You Feel My Love” by Bob Dylan, while senior Sarah Khanzam, vice president of Concert Band with the Marist Band, accompanied her on the piano.

Andruszkiewicz said that while the song is primarily about romantic love, it fit the event because of its tie to a more general love and care for humanity.

Audience members sang along with Reverend Gail Burger as she sang “One Blue Sky Above Us” by Pete Seeger and played the acoustic guitar.

While the event was dominated by praxis students, some individuals attended of their own free will. Some had friends involved in the forum.

Sophomore Thurman Reed, college activities technician, set up about 100 chairs for the event, but the room did not reach full capacity.

Many praxis students aspire to fill more seats in future forums. Freshman Samantha DeVito believes that this can be accomplished in coming years and that students will benefit from the enlightening experience.

Despite the serious nature of the issues being presented, students and faculty alike generally had an optimistic tone.

Praxis student Dominica Achola, who visited Haiti in the spring of 2011, encouraged students to ask themselves the following question: “What can I do to make a change in this world?”

Peter-Racul’s attitude: “We can do a lot about it. Let’s do it.”