

# A woman of distinction

**Fern Mattson has received the Distinguished Alumni Citation for a lifetime of devotion to God and nearly four decades of dedication to Spain's poorest population.**

By Ardyce Czuchna-Curl

It wasn't so long ago that early morning would find Fern Mattson, a 1955 HC graduate, at the Mission Urbana, preparing for another busy day serving the poor of Valencia, Spain. Men, women, and children would line up long before the doors were opened. Some came for food. Others were there to pick up their laundry. Some took a shower and chose a clean shirt or blanket. Still others received haircuts and asked for help in finding a job.

But this story actually begins when Fern was at HC. "During Spiritual Emphasis Week when I was a sophomore, I dedicated my life to the Lord and told Him I was willing to do whatever He asked of me," Fern says. "Over a period of 10 years, He gradually led me into my life's work—serving Him in Spain."

After graduation, Fern taught in Michigan secondary schools, but she left teaching "temporarily" to study at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. "While I was at Moody, the Lord showed me He wanted me in foreign missions," Fern says. "At Moody, I participated in the European Prayer Band, and we prayed a lot for Spain, which was almost a closed country in those days. When you pray for specific needs, God sometimes uses you to be part of the solution to that need."

While earning a diploma from Moody and a master's degree in education from Northwestern University, Fern searched for sponsors to fund her living expenses; all of her service as a missionary would be as a volunteer. As a result, her support came from individual contributors through the Greater Europe Mission, a non-denominational Protestant organization now headquartered in Monument, Colorado.

When she arrived in Spain in 1963, Fern was eager to get involved in all

the missionary activities, and although she'd studied Spanish, language was still a big hurdle. "Soon, however, I had many opportunities to practice my Spanish," Fern says. "The children were especially helpful, but even the adults appreciated my struggling efforts and did their best to understand."



Fern Mattson

After her orientation, Fern worked in Castelldefels near Barcelona and then served in Pamplona, a city in northern Spain. In 1973, she began working in Valencia, and in 1992, she began work with Mission Urbana.

Many of the mission's clients are homeless, and many come from Eastern Europe, Northern Africa, and South America. Attending religious services and Bible-study sessions is not mandatory, but many clients elect to attend, and a number have made commitments to Christ.

Fern helped establish and direct camps for children, conducted Bible classes for adults and children, organized and worked with Good News Clubs, and trained instructors to run camps and Bible studies and teach Sunday school. Fern's main emphasis was to have a vision, start the work, train others, and then go on to another ministry.

Evangelical Christians make up less than 1 percent of the population in Spain. Most of the Spaniards are Catholic, but there is a considerable number of Muslims and Jewish people. Evangelical churches in Valencia cooperate in many programs, such as camps, evangelistic campaigns, and social outreaches to the general population. Approximately a dozen churches are committed to Mission Urbana that Fern helped organize. Fern enlisted volunteers, many of whom already had regular full-time jobs.

Fern's mission duties officially ended in July, and she now lives with her sister, Phyllis Ipcinski, in Sun City, Arizona. During Homecoming 2001, Fern received the Distinguished Alumni Citation, the highest award bestowed by the HC Alumni

Association. It recognizes outstanding service and achievement over an extended period of time. The individuals who receive this award represent the ideals of HC through their profession or through some other area of service.

Although her mission is over, Fern is hardly ready to retire, and she's applied to teach Spanish at a junior college and special education. With so many long-time friends still in Spain, Fern hopes she'll soon have a chance to visit. ■

*Note: The author, Ardyce (Hoffer, '55) Czuchna-Curl, and Sandra Schacht ('55) visited Fern in Spain in March 2000.*