

serious susies

by Dawn C. Zimmer

The coeds at Stephens College make religion and community service a vital part of campus life.



An aged resident of the county rest home is quite proud of some of her needlework as she shows it off to two students who have come to visit her. The girls bring materials and give her fresh ideas.



A student project worker at the state school for the deaf masters a new word in sign language while another little friend seems intrigued with the problem of fastening a chain clasp about her neck.



Dr. Harry Philpott, former dean of religious life at Stephens College, leads discussion with group of students who take part in community service projects.

MORE THAN 1,000 students out of 1,500 at Stephens College in Columbia, Mo., are volunteers on 14 community service projects. Instead of confining religion to Sundays, the girls at this women's junior college are extending it to the other six days, learning the joy of giving to others.

That date after class may be postponed while Susie (nickname for all Stephens students) visits aged residents of the county rest home or reads to the children at a community nursery. She may forgo the enjoyment of Saturday afternoon football to work at the state mental hospital. She is learning that "charity is not a basket of fruit tied with a red ribbon, but showing up when you promised you would," says Mrs. Patricia Hook, director of the projects.

The community service projects are one phase of Burrall, the nondenominational religious program at Stephens. Instructions and discussions are the other two. Basic to Stephens' philosophy is the belief that religion is the foundation upon which a successful life must be built. The college places as much emphasis on religion as it does on the sciences, arts, history, personal appearance, or social abilities.

The Burrall Program was founded in 1921 by Mrs. Jessie Burrall Eubank, first director of religious activities at Stephens. She proposed to make religion a seven-day experience through worship and service.

Today her program is flourishing and expanding. New projects are added and from them spring many incidental activities—the little boy who wanted to play a ukulele but couldn't afford lessons (two girls taught him); the bedridden mother whose basement apartment needed cleaning (two students did the work).

A patient at the mental hospital has called volunteer workers such as the Susies "the people who still believe we are individuals—who teach us to lift our heads again and walk with our faces toward a new sunrise." The patient, who was soon to be discharged, received a little of the courage needed to face the world when a

student styled her hair, applied her make-up, and helped refurbish her wardrobe. Last year, for the first time, patients were invited to an event away from the hospital when 70 came to campus for a Christmas party.

"It's like a light turned on when the girls walk into the ward," says Mrs. Hook of the county rest-home project. The residents awaken from their apathy, eager to talk with the girls, so pleased because they're not forgotten!

Girls who visit children at the state school for the deaf speak of the "happy silence" that prevails. A touch, a smile, an attitude convey as much happiness as does the noisy chatter, shouting, and laughter when normal children play. A student's reward for working on this project? Perhaps it's the child who runs up to her when she arrives for a visit, spelling out her name in sign language, or the ecstatic look on his face when she takes the trouble to learn to "talk" with him.

One of the most popular projects is orphan adoption. At Christmas, Missouri orphans are "adopted" by students who send each the gift of his choice. Last year 1,500 gifts went to 538 orphans.

All these Burrall projects are an application of what students learn through the instruction and discussion phases. The Sunday morning Burrall Class is a nondenominational program which has been the largest Sunday School in the world. The program consists of music, and a talk by the dean of religious life or an outside guest speaker.

How has the Burrall program affected Stephens students? Many alumnae attribute their present interest in community service to their training in Burrall activities. A student director of the projects said, "When I came to college I planned to major in fashion. Now I want to go into social work."

For the student inclined to take a vacation from religion while in college, or the student who thinks religion is something a minister talks about on Sunday, Burrall often opens up a whole new way of life!