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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **New hire at Mary's Pence will help Central American women build business skills**

St. Paul, Minn. (July 22, 2015) –St. Paul based-Mary's Pence has hired Gabriela Bandini to be the Business Facilitator for its ESPERA Program in Mexico, Central America and Haiti. This is a newly created position, made possible by a bequest from a longtime supporter.

The ESPERA Program, a community lending program launched in 2008, now consists of nine groups of over 900 women, in six countries. Each group of women collectively owns a pool of money, donated by Mary's Pence, from which they are able to take out loans and start income generating projects including growing and selling various crops, making and selling food, and making and selling artisan crafts.

"We are so excited to add this new position," said Mary's Pence Executive Director Katherine Wojtan. "As our ESPERA groups and businesses have grown, the need for a business facilitator to teach record keeping, budgeting and marketing has become increasingly apparent. This is especially challenging given many of the women participating in the lending pools are illiterate. The good news is that women are asking for this support."

Gabriela, a Mexican native, has nine years of experience managing social business projects in rural areas, and has focused special attention to the intersectionality of gender issues with inequality and poverty.

Mary's Pence is a St. Paul-based grant-making organization that funds local women's initiatives across the Americas and the Caribbean. The organization invests in projects that support women's well-being – physical, social and economic and business models that foster women working together to enhance learning, mutual support and creativity. Since its inception in 1987, it has granted over \$1,500,000 to 500 projects in 15 countries. It has sponsored nine ESPERA Funds – lending pools owned and managed by a women's network in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and Haiti. Mary's Pence is an independent, faith-based organization. Learn more about Mary's Pence at [www.maryspence.org](http://www.maryspence.org)