

Standing in Solidarity with Latina Women

These are brief biographies of Latina women and women who are working in solidarity with Latinas. Read the biographies and identify which you wish to share during your Lenten Soup Supper. Use these during the Mayan Alter / Prayer Circle. Pick any that are especially meaningful to you and those attending the gathering.. Include some well known names and some lesser known women leaders.

Mary's Pence publishes a calendar each year highlighting a woman of courage on each day of the year. Brief bios are on the website Resource page.

Our Lady of Carmel of the Maipu, Chile

Since the image of Our Lady of Carmel was first commissioned in 1785, the Virgin has been associated with the struggles for independence of the Chilean nation. On January 5, 1817, General Jose de San Martin placed his baton in the right hand of the statue and solemnly named Our Lady the Patroness of the Army of the Andes. In 1818, as the Spanish forces advanced on Chile, the people and their leaders crowded into the cathedral to pray at Our Lady's feet, promising to raise a church in her honor at the very site where Chile's independence was gained. Chile was liberated and before the end of the year the first stone was laid. The sanctuary was completed in 1892. In 1923, at the request of the Chilean bishops, the Holy See proclaimed the Virgin of Carmel principal patroness of all Chileans. There are two Carmel images that Chileans venerate—one at the National Shrine of the Maipu, and one at the Basilica of the Savior in Santiago de Chile. The liturgical feast is celebrated on the last Sunday of September.

Rigoberta Menchu

(January 9, 1959 -)

Rigoberta Menchu was born in a small Guatemalan village to a poor Quiche Indian family who lived on a plantation as laborers. At that time, indigenous people had no rights as citizens, which made them vulnerable to the forced takeovers of plantations. Rigoberta's family became active in protesting these conditions and one by one they were killed for their part in the protests. After her mother was killed, Rigoberta was persecuted and exiled to Mexico. She became an active leader in the defense of the rights of indigenous people. During this time she wrote her autobiography which led to international attention for the conflict between the Indians and the military government of Guatemala. In 1992, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and she used the cash prize of \$1.2 million to start a foundation in her father's name as a way to continue the fight for human rights. Because of her efforts, the United Nations declared 1993 as the International Year for the Indigenous Populations.

Gabriela Mistral

(April 7, 1889- January 10, 1957)

Gabriela was born Lucila Godoy Alcayaga in Vicuna, Chile to a dilettante poet. In 1945, she became the first Latin America writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. She started to write poetry about nature and the poor while she was a teacher. Afraid that her work officers would not like her poems, she created a pen name. She chose her name from her two favorite poets, Gabriele D'Annunzio and Frederic Mistral. *Gabriela* also represents the angel Gabriel, the bearer of good news, and *mistral* is the Spanish word for "wind."

Gabriela played an important role in the educational systems of both Chile and Mexico, and was also the Chilean consul in Naples, Madrid, and Lisbon. She taught Spanish literature at Columbia University, Middlebury College, Vassar College, and the University of Puerto Rico. She later joined the lay order of the Franciscans. Her tomb is inscribed with her words, "What the soul is to the body, so is the artist to his people."

Sister Dianna Ortiz, OSU

(1958 -)

Sr. Dianna is an Ursuline nun from the United States who traveled as a missionary to Guatemala to work with women and children in the rural regions. On November 2, 1989, she was kidnapped from a garden in Antigua, Guatemala. Over the next 24 hours she was tortured and raped until she managed to escape. She believed that one of her captors was an American and returned to the United States to uncover the truth. She has spoken about her ordeal and written a book, *The*

Blindfold's Eyes, as a way to raise concern about the plight of those abducted and the victims of torture. She is the founder of Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition (TASSC). Her witness compelled the US government to release papers and documents that could help Sr. Dianna, and others who have suffered similar fates in Guatemala, prosecute abusers of human rights.

The Kuna People of Panama

The Kuna Indians of Panama are known as an independent and well-organized tribe that has maintained control over their territory while the majority of the indigenous people of Latin America have had to fight for their independence from oppressive governments and immigrants. Led by a matriarchal society, the Kuna women have brought their people together through music, dance and the verbal arts. The strength of these women has helped maintain their culture and self-determination.

The Kuna women share the gift of their beautiful hand-embroidered molas. The sale of these items constitutes a major source of income as many women will leave the island to travel to Panama City where tourists are eager to buy their crafts. One of the challenges that the women face today is how to strike a balance between preserving their culture and living in a world that uses consumerism as the means that allows them to provide for their people and maintain their culture.

Our Lady of Copacabana, Bolivia

The peninsula of Copacabana is located in Bolivia near the islands of the Sun and Moon, sacred sites of the Incas. It is here that the devotion to the “Most Blessed Virgin de la Candelaria, Our Lady of Copacabana” originated.

Josefa Ortiz de Dominguez

(March 19, 1771 – March 2, 1829)

Born Josefa Ortiz Giron into the Creole elite in Mexico, Josefa became committed to helping Mexico gain independence from Spain. She even influenced her husband, Miguel, to become a supporter of the separatist cause. Fearing a war for independence, the authorities ordered Miguel to lock up his wife because of her outspokenness. However, Josefa's resourcefulness made it possible for her to get word to other rebel leaders instructing them to flee, which enabled the later uprising against Spain. She was arrested and confined to the Santa Clara convent where she remained until the end of the war in 1821. After her death, she was buried in Santa Catalina but later her remains were shipped to her home city, Queretaro. She was then honored by the state congress as *benemerita* (meritorious). A statue of her can be found in Mexico City.

Antonia Pantoja

(c. 1920-)

Born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Antonia's early childhood was marked by hunger, want and disease. After receiving a Normal School Diploma, she taught in Puerto Rico before moving to New York City in 1944, where she worked in a factory and involved herself in union organizing and workers' rights. While a graduate student at Columbia in 1953, she founded the Puerto Rican Association for Community Affairs (PRACA), a social service organization which also championed leadership development and women's issues. In 1958, she established the Puerto Rican Forum and in 1961 founded ASPIRA, a national organization dedicated to education and leadership formation of youth.

In 1970, Antonia founded the Puerto Rican Research and Resource Center and established Universidad Boricua, the first and only Puerto Rican controlled bilingual university. In 1985, she returned to Puerto Rico to launch PRODUCIR, which serves the poor in rural areas by creating its own cottage industries to generate employment, and a credit union to provide economic stability. In 1997, she was the first Hispanic woman to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Julia Alvarez

(March 27, 1950 -)

Julia Alvarez is a well-known author from the Dominican Republic who has lived in US for many years. She is the author of several books detailing the struggle of immigration to the US and trying to adjust to life here. She and her husband

started an organic coffee farm in the Dominican Republic on what was thought to be “used up” land. They teach the workers sustainable methods of farming, and started a school to teach both children and adults to read and write.

Emma Sepulveda

Emma Sepulveda grew up in Argentina and Chile, ultimately fleeing to the United States after Augusto Pinochet took over. She has dedicated the past 25 years to working with Arpilleristas, the Chilean women's movement. One of the first Latinas to run for Nevada Senate, she founded the nonprofit organization, Latinos for Political Education.

Marjorie Agosin

(1955 -)

Marjorie Agosin is recognized as a premier Latin American voice for human rights and her writing. Although she is descended from Austrian and Russian Jews who suffered in the Holocaust, she was born in Chile and lived there until she was 16 years old. She then moved to the United States to escape the repercussions of a military coup. She has won numerous awards for her human rights work including the United Nations Leadership Award for Human Rights and awards for her work as a Latina writer.

Mercedes Lopez

(1933 -)

Born into a family of Mexican tenant farmers, Mercedes was brought up working in the fields, and working with her mother who was a midwife and healer. In 1963, Mercedes immigrated to America with her children searching for a better way of life. She worked with her husband in the vineyards and orchards of California, and cared for her and other's children. She currently works to keep the Mexican culture alive among immigrants, creating beautiful piñatas, sewing traditional costumes, showing the children she cares for and local schools the art of paper cutting, teaching songs, and making recipes that she learned as a child. She teaches the children in hopes that the Mexican culture will continue through them. Mercedes is also known in her community for her work as a folk artist.

Digna Ochoa

(May 15, 1964 - October 19, 2001)

Digna Ochoa was a leading Mexican human rights lawyer who took upon herself some of Mexico's most controversial cases, such as working in the defense of Rodolfo Monteil and Teodoro Caberra, anti-logging activists. After receiving numerous death threats and being kidnapped several times for her continued work, Digna was found dead in her office on October 19, 2001. Since then the people of Mexico and other citizens around the world have called for Mexico to end impunity and to stop the abuse of those working for civil rights.

Virgin of the Papanthla (Mexico)

According to legend, four hundred years ago in Mexico, the Totonaca Indians were visited by Franciscan priests who came to Papanthla to teach about Christianity. The priests suggested to the people that they create an image of the Virgin Mary out of a straight young tree. They found a tree and then saw an image of the virgin next to it which the woodcarvers carved in the tree. She had a dark face, like the Indians, and wore a wide blue skirt, the color of the morning sky. On her head was a crown of jungle flowers and about her shoulders a white lacy shawl, similar in appearance to the shawl that Totonaca women often wear.

The woodcarvers put her in the church of Tecolutla and called her The Blue Virgin of Tecolutla. By some miracle, the statue was mysteriously moved to the church of Papanthla. It was taken back to the original church, but during the night, Mary is said to have stepped down from her pedestal and walked back to Papanthla. This happened several times and despite guards from both cities watching her, none saw how she was moved. The two groups agreed not to war and the people of Papanthla paid for the statue

Ann Manganaro

Talk about healing always reminds me of my late friend, Sr. Ann Manganaro, SL, MD. Sr. Ann was a physician, teacher, and the founder of several small health care organizations in Central America. She died in St. Louis at age 47. Bereft of her great skill and her lovely appearance, she was reduced in her last days to receiving care from others.

"I finally understand the wounds," Sr. Ann told a friend at that time.

"Your wounds?" the friend asked, for Sr. Ann had undergone a mastectomy when she was first found to have cancer.

"No," she replied.

"The wounds of El Salvador?" the friend persisted. Sr. Ann had often performed emergency surgery in that country during its civil war.

"No," she answered. "I mean the wounds of humanity, the wounds of us all."

Ann Manganaro was a woman of the Gospels. As we know from the resurrection narratives, St. Thomas was scandalized by the terrible reality of Jesus' wounds—they blocked his faith and his hope. It was for that reason that, when the risen Lord came to him, Jesus said only, "Enter the wounds." Like St. Thomas, we are all called to acknowledge not only the wounds of the Lord but also the wounds of our own humanity. We must not repress the memory of what we truly are. We must love our wounds. If we love them, they will never disgrace or degrade us. They will be our glory.

As a teaching resident physician, Sr. Ann had spent a good deal of her time in the neonatal intensive care unit with Tamika, a tiny girl who had been born prematurely and without a family. When Tamika died six weeks after she was born, only Sr. Ann, the funeral director, and I attended the wake. I was desolated and angry. "This poor baby," I complained. "She had no family, no real funeral; she never had a day unplugged from tubes and shunts, never a day of breathing on her own; her life was meaningless."

But Ann disagreed. "You are forgetting that Tamika had the power to evoke my love."

Gloria Rolando

(April 4, 1953 -)

A native of Cuba, Rolando was a precocious student, and received her pre-university diploma at the age of eighteen, majoring in Science and Literature, with a minor in Music. After attending the University of Havana, Rolando began working at the Cuban Institute of Art and Film Industry, where she has remained for two decades. In the span of her twenty-year career, Rolando has written and directed numerous films and documentaries. Rolando's work largely focuses on the cultural aspects of the Caribbean, as well as the African cultures present in Cuba. Rolando has developed 'Imagines del Caribe', an independent film group where she has recently completed her latest film, which is concerned with the 1912 massacre of the Independents of Color.

Patria Jimenez

In 1997, Patria Jimenez was the first open homosexual voted into the Mexican legislature, and the first in Latin America. In a country where the majority of the government is male oriented and homosexuality is widely condemned, her election into office is thought of by many as a first step for the representation of Mexico's gay minority. She has begun to tackle issues that have been previously ignored, from AIDS activism and safe sex to the rights of homosexuals and lesbians.

Jovita Idar

(1885 - 1946)

The "Heroine of LaRaza" was born in 1885 in Laredo, Texas. At 18, she earned a teaching certificate and began to instruct Mexican children, but was frustrated with the conditions in which she had to teach. She became a journalist and activist, writing weekly articles for *La Cronica*. Idar called for equal education and an end to the extreme discrimination against Mexican children in public schools.

Jovita wrote graphic descriptions of the lynchings of a Mexican child by the Texas Rangers and the burning at the stake of 20-year-old Antonio Rodriguez. In 1911 her newspaper called for the formation of "La Gran Liga Mexicanista de Beneficencia y Protection" so the community would work together. She sponsored the "Primer Congreso Mexicanista" to protect Mexican-Americans against racist and brutal acts. From this movement came the feminist organization "Liga Femenil Mexicanista." Jovita and other women formed their own schools and allowed Mexican children to attend for free. After crossing the border to serve as a nurse in the Cruz Blanca, she wrote an article criticizing Woodrow Wilson's deployment of troops to the border. Shortly after, her printing presses were destroyed by the Texas Rangers, but she stood her ground. After marrying, she moved to San Antonio where she organized "El Club Democata" within the Democratic Party, and established a bilingual kindergarten. She continued to work as a writer and educator until her death.

Marjorie Tuite, OP

(died June 28, 1986)

Sister Marjorie Tuite was a social activist and an advocate of women's rights in the Catholic Church. In 1942 she became a member of the Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs in Columbus. She served as director of the National Ecumenical Action for Church Women United. In her later years, she traveled extensively in Central America and in 1984 served as a delegate to the First Congress on Human Rights. Her opposition to U.S. policy in Central America and her advocacy on women's rights brought her into conflict with church hierarchy. This confrontation included the threat of expulsion for signing, with 23 other American nuns, a newspaper advertisement calling for dialogue within the church on the abortion issue.

Luisa Moreno

(1907 – 1990)

Luisa Moreno was born in Guatemala to an upper middle class family, which enabled her to study at the College of the Holy Name in Oakland, California. In the 1930s she began organizing Hispanic garment factory workers in Spanish Harlem in New York City and cigar workers in Florida. Later she traveled throughout the Southwest serving as an editor of a CIO newspaper and organizing agricultural workers. By the end of the 1930s she concentrated her work on Mexican-American civil rights, founding the Congress of Spanish-Speaking People in 1938. The first conference was to take place that year in Albuquerque, but the House Un-American Activities Committee accused the group of being Communist sympathizers. The meeting was postponed and later held in Los Angeles. At one time, the congress had membership of about 70,000, and constituted the first Mexican-American civil rights organization. Eventually the organization fizzled out and Moreno was forced to flee to Mexico because of her suspected Communist activity. She later went to Cuba where she took part in the early days of the Revolution, before returning to Mexico. She died in 1990 in poverty in Guadalajara.

Dona Maria del Carmen Calvillo

(1765 – 1856)

Before the American Southwest came under the control of the United States, Hispanic women inhabited farms and ranches in the area, exercising many rights not known again to women for several decades. In Texas alone, over sixty land grants were given directly to women, without passing through the finance books of husbands or fathers. Owner of a large ranch in Wilson County, Doña Maria del Carmen Calvillo possessed the same talents as many men on the frontier including roping and shooting expertly. Calvillo came into possession of the land after her father's death and under her management, El Rancho de las Cabras flourished. Calvillo built an extensive irrigation system, granary and sugar mill on the ranch. With many native people as neighbors, Dona Maria helped to maintain a peace between the tribes by sharing cattle and grain with those in need.

Our Lady of Carmen, Chile

Our Lady of Carmen, or Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, is the title under which Mary is honored as the patroness of Chile. Worship of her has been closely tied to the struggle of the Chilean people for independence. She was originally patroness of the Chilean armed forces as they fought against the oppressive Spanish. In 1923, at the request of the Chilean bishops, the Holy See proclaimed the Virgin of Carmel patroness of Chile.

Eulalia Arrila de Perez

(1773 – 1878)

Eulalia managed an early mission in the northern frontier of Mexico called Mission San Gabriel. She directed the amount of supplies coming in and out of the mission and ran the main kitchen. She instructed the women working there in making such goods as wine and olive oil, carding wool, spinning, weaving, and sewing, and threshing wheat. Eulalia was respected for her ability as a healer and midwife, in addition to helping the mission to run efficiently, while raising a family of her own. As she grew older, she was given a home and two small ranchos in appreciation for her hard work in helping San Gabriel run smoothly and productively.

Mev Puleo

Mev Puleo traveled to Haiti, Brazil, El Salvador and elsewhere in the Third World, documenting in her photographs the life, struggles, and humanity of the poor. She aimed "to revere the human spirit and bridge the distance between persons." She carried her message through photo exhibits, her writing, her lectures and a video completed just before she died. Her

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book, *The Struggle is One*, on the Church in Brazil is based on her interviews with grassroots activists, prophetic bishops and liberation theologians who identified with the suffering poor and their struggle for justice and liberation. In January 1996, Mev Puleo died of a malignant brain tumor. She “had wanted to give the poor a face, a voice. She always wanted to be identified with them.” In her short life, she was able to accomplish what she had set out to do.

Antonia Hernandez

(1948 -)

As President and General Counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), Antonia acts as a spokeswoman for thirty-five million Latin Americans in the United States. Born on a communal ranch in Mexico, her family immigrated to Los Angeles when she was very young, where they felt Antonia and her five siblings would receive better educational opportunities. After graduating from high school, Antonia attended UCLA, where she received an undergraduate degree in history, her teaching certificate, and her law degree. In 1979, she was the first Latin-American woman to serve on a staff counsel to the U. S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, and in 1980 she advocated bilingual voting assistance. In 1981 Antonia began her work with MALDEF, to which she continues to contribute today. Under her leadership, MALDEF ensured political representation for Latin Americans and furthered educational opportunities for children of undocumented immigrants. Today she speaks for National Public Radio’s Latino U.S.A. program, and acts as a voice for Latin Americans. She has received numerous honors and awards.

Our Lady of Angels, Costa Rica

In the city of Cartago, as in many other colonial towns, whites segregated themselves from Indians and mestizos. Any who were not purely white were barred from entering the city, and a stone cross marked the boundary. On August 2, 1635 (the feast of the Holy Angels) Juana Pereira, a poor mestiza woman, discovered a small image of the Virgin carved on a dark stone in the footpath. She picked it up and took it home, but it disappeared and returned to the same rock where it was found. This happened five times, with the statue disappearing from cupboards and chests, even the parish tabernacle. The people took this as a sign that our Lady wanted a center of worship on that spot, where she could comfort the poor and humble. “La Negrita” as she is affectionately called by the people of Costa Rica, was solemnly crowned in 1926 and in 1935 Pope Pius XI declared the beautiful shrine of the Queen of Angels a Basilica.

Isabel Allende

(August 2, 1942 -)

Born in Peru and raised in Chile, Bolivia, Europe, and the Middle East, Isabel Allende’s childhood was flavored with the cultures of numerous places. The daughter of a diplomat, she became accustomed to constant traveling, and attended numerous American schools overseas. After completing her secondary education in Chile, Isabel worked with the United Nations’ FAO in Santiago, and later in Belgium. She worked as a journalist in Chile until a military coup led her to flee to Venezuela, when she discovered her grandfather was close to death. Upon hearing the news, she began writing a long letter reassuring him that he would always live on through her memories. This work eventually grew into her internationally acclaimed novel *The House of the Spirits*, which was produced as a motion picture in 1993.

Since the success of her first novel, Isabel has moved to San Rafael in California, where she obtained United States citizenship in 2003. She has authored several other works of fiction, as well as memoirs. Her 1999 bestseller *Daughter of Fortune* was chosen to be read in Oprah’s Book Club, and her novel *Portrait in Sepia* was also met with great praise.

Rose of Lima

(1586 – August 24, 1617)

Born in 1586 in Lima, Peru, Rose decided at a young age to devote her life to God and not to marry. This dashed the hopes of her parents who hoped to secure the financial well being of their large family by marrying Rose to one of her many wealthy suitors. Despite family pressure, she held fast but supplemented the family income through her sewing. She is reported to have engaged in a number of severe penitential practices even as a child, such as wearing heavy chains under her clothing that cut into her flesh. At her insistence, her parents eventually built her a separate tiny dwelling in their backyard where she lived alone and prayed. She is reputed to have had extraordinary mystical gifts.

To this day, local people approach her dwelling with written petitions and prayers. She was the first canonized saint of the Americas and is the patron saint of South America and the Philippines.

Our Lady of the Rosary, Guatemala

The image of Our Lady of the Rosary, made of pure silver, dates back to 1592. Her devotees claim that the coloring of her face changes whenever there is a conflict or some national misfortune is imminent. In 1821, the leaders of the independence movement proclaimed her Patroness of the new nation, and took an oath before her image that they would not rest until they freed Guatemala. The Virgin of the Rosary was solemnly declared "Queen of Guatemala" in 1833 and was crowned canonically on January 26, 1934 in a ceremony in front of the cathedral. The ceremony had to be held in the open because there was no church large enough to hold the multitude that had gathered. The church and convent of St. Dominic, current shrine of the Virgin of the Rosary, was begun in 1788 and completed in 1808. October, the month dedicated to the rosary, is the most popular and important religious happening for the Guatemalan people.

Our Lady Aparecida, Brazil

In October of 1717, the Count of Assumar was passing through Guarantingueta, a small city in the Paraiba river valley. The people of Guarantingueta decided to hold a great feast to honor the Count. They fished for the feast but caught nothing. Three men prayed to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, "Mother of God and our Mother, we need to find fish!" A short time later, they netted the body of a statue of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception and then the head. They wrapped it in some cloths and continued to fish. The net became filled with fish. This was the first miracle of Our Lady of Aparecida.

It is not known how the small statue came to rest at the bottom of the river, but its artist is known: Frei Agostino de Jesus, a "carioca" monk from Sao Paulo. In 1930 Pope Pius XII proclaimed Our Lady Aparecida principal patroness of Brazil. Her feast, on October 12, is a national holiday. Pope John Paul II visited the Virgin Aparecida in her sanctuary and gave it the title of Basilica.

Vilma Martinez

(October 17, 1943 -)

Hispanic civil rights activist Vilma Martinez battled racial prejudice her entire life, being told her ethnicity made her incapable of her aspirations. However, Martinez's determination and perseverance to overcome stereotypes while helping others has resulted in a success many thought her incapable of as a female minority. When she was only 29, Vilma transformed a small civil rights organization into a nationally recognized political force. Under her leadership, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund gained the authority to end educational segregation for Latin American students and advocate the expansion of the Voting Rights Act to include protection for Mexican Americans. She has formed numerous youth programs and began a nationwide program urging Latin Americans to participate in the census. She served as President of the University of California Board of Regents, and continues today to litigate in state and federal courts in issues of employment and commercial discrimination.

Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz

(November 12, 1651 - 1695)

Raised by her maternal grandfather who taught her to read and write, Sor Juana was sent to live in Mexico City when he died. In 1664 she was presented at court and became a lady-in-waiting, but desired to live alone and continue her studies. At 19 she went to live with the Discalced Carmelites. However, a year and a half later, she took her vows at the convent of San Jeronimo, an order known for its leniency.

Her convent cell became an intellectual center, a site for salons among the city's elite. Sor Juana wrote music and poetry and avoided theological topics until she was drawn to defend women's biblical and theological rights to an education. She wrote about the benefits to society when women are educated until she was silenced by the archbishop and no longer allowed to write public essays.

Violeta Barrios de Chamorro

(October 18, 1929 -)

Violeta was born in Rivas, Nicaragua into a comfortable middle class family. She was educated for a few years in the United States, but returned home when her father died suddenly and she never finished her education. In 1950 she married Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Cardenal, editor at his family's newspaper, *La Prensa*, which was critical of the Somoza

dictatorship. Pedro was assassinated on January 10, 1978 in Managua. His death was attributed to Samozá and sparked 18 months of civil war.

In 1990, the Sandinista government, which overthrew the Samozá family, agreed to hold elections. At that time, Chamorro was chosen as the presidential candidate of the National Opposition Union. Her campaign pledge was to end the military draft and seek national reconciliation. From 1990-1997, Chamorro served as the president of Nicaragua. Although she faced opposition from both the Sandinistas and the United States-backed contras, she raised significant aid grants from 17 countries, including the United States, to help salvage the waning economy.

Cecilia and Julia Ramos

(February 27, 1973 – November 16, 1989) and (March 5, 1947 – November 16, 1989)

On November 16, 1989, six Jesuits were murdered by the Salvadoran military on the campus of the University of Central America (UCA) in San Salvador, El Salvador. Their housekeeper, Julia Ramos, and her daughter, Celia Marisela Ramos, were murdered there as well. The Jesuits were labeled subversives for speaking out against the oppressive socioeconomic structure of Salvadoran society. Their assassinations were ordered for their unwavering defense of the poor.

Cecilia and Julia were two of over 70,000 victims who died in El Salvador's civil war, which raged in the 1980s and early 1990s. The vast majority of these victims were civilians killed by El Salvador's armed forces and paramilitary death squads. The death of the Jesuits brought international outrage and condemnation upon the Salvadoran Government and pressured its officials to negotiate an end to the country's civil war.

Mother of Divine Providence, Puerto Rico

The name and worship of Our Lady of the Divine Providence originated in Italy in the 13th century. It was a very popular devotion which later passed to Spain, where a shrine was built in Tarragona, Catalonia. When Gil Esteve Tomas, a Catalan, was named bishop of Puerto Rico, he brought with him this devotion. The original image was a beautiful oil painting in which the Virgin is shown with the Divine Child sleeping peacefully in her arms. The image that Don Gil Esteve ordered was carved in Barcelona. Pope Paul VI, by a decree signed on November 19, 1969, declared Our Lady Mother of Divine Providence principal patroness of the island of Puerto Rico.

In this document it was also decreed that the Virgin's solemnity be transferred from January 2 to November 19, the day that the island was discovered, to join together the two great loves of the Puerto Ricans. The oldest carving, which dates from 1853, was the one chosen to be solemnly crowned during the meeting of the Latin American Bishops Council that took place in San Juan de Puerto Rico on November 5, 1976. On the eve of this event, the image was vilely burnt in the Parish of Little St. Therese in Santurce and crowned. The burnt statue was sent to Spain to be restored and is presently awaiting the construction of the projected Grand National Sanctuary, where it will be placed.

Gregoria Ortega and Gloria Gallardo

Gregoria Ortega, OLVN, and Gloria Gallardo, SHG, are the founders of Las Hermanas, a national organization for Hispanic Catholic women both lay and religious. In 1970, the two women began to solicit names of Mexican-American women from dioceses around the country. Fifty women arrived in Houston in April 1971 and agreed to form Las Hermanas and set forth the guidelines that would determine its national agenda for the next 20 years. The guidelines included establishing a clearinghouse for information, to increase communication about the needs of the community, working for social change, training members in leadership and exerting pressure on hierarchy to achieve goals. The first national meeting was held in Santa Fe in November 1971. Las Hermanas gave support to the United Farm Workers in national boycotts and demonstrations. In 1988 the national board of directors chose San Antonio as the permanent site.

Our Lady of Quinche, Ecuador

In 1594 the people of the El Cisne region desired their own religious relic and asked a sculptor to create a statue of Mary. When those who had ordered the statue couldn't pay for it, he traded it to Oyacachi Indians and was moved to the village of Quinche in 1604. Our Lady of Quinche is known as the "people's Madonna" and was declared a national sanctuary in 1985. She is referred to as "the Little One".

Our Lady of Peace, El Salvador

Tradition has it that some time in 1682 some merchants found an abandoned box on the shore of Salvador's "Mar del Sur." They were unable to open the box and decided to take it to the City of San Miguel where they would find out how to open it. They tied the box on a donkey's back and undertook the long and dangerous journey to the city where they arrived on November 21, meaning to inform the local authorities of their find. But when they went by the parish church, the donkey lay down on the ground. They were then able to open the box and were surprised to find that it contained a lovely image of Our Lady holding the Child.

The origin of this image is still a mystery as it never was known for whom the box was intended, or how it came to reach the beaches of El Salvador. It is said that a hard and bloody struggle was going on between the inhabitants of the region, but when they heard of the marvelous discovery in the abandoned box, they put down their weapons and immediately ceased fighting. It is also related that during the 1833 fratricidal struggles, the victorious side had the blessed image placed in the atrium of the parish church instead of taking reprisals. At the feet of Our Lady, a solemn vow was made to keep no grudges and to erase all hatred from the hearts so that peace would bring about brotherhood and reconciliation. This is why the image was given the title of Our Lady of Peace.

The statute is a dressed wood carving with the national shield of El Salvador embroidered on the front of the image's white robe. The image holds a gold palm leaf in memory of the eruption of the "Chaparrastique" volcano, which threatened to destroy the city with burning lava. The frightened dwellers of San Miguel brought out the statute of Our Lady of Peace to the principal door of the cathedral, and at that precise moment the force of the lava changed direction, moving away from the city. In the exact place where the lava changed direction there's a town called "Milagro de la Paz" (Miracle of Peace).

On the day this happened, September 21, 1787, everyone saw in the sky, formed by the clouds, a white palm leaf that seemed to sprout from the crater of the volcano. Considering that this was a sign of the Virgin's protection, her faithful decided to place in her hand a gold palm like the one they had seen in the sky. Benedict XV authorized the crowning of the image on November 21, 1921. The new shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Peace was completed in 1953.

Las Mariposas

The Mirabals were four sisters who grew up in Salcedo in the 1940s Dominican Republic during the era of the dictator Rafael Trujillo. Three- Minerva, Patria, and Maria Teresa – were killed by Trujillo's followers for their involvement in efforts to overthrow the fascist government. The surviving sister, Bélgica (more commonly known as Dedé), lives in Salcedo, tending the museum in Ojo de Agua that commemorates her sisters. The Mirabal sisters, now national heroines of the Dominican Republic, have been immortalized in poem, fiction, art, and even an international day dedicated to them. Their nickname, the Butterflies, comes from their code name during the resistance movement.

Jean Donovan, Ita Ford, Maura Clarke, Dorothy Kazel

Jean Donovan was born in 1953. She and her brother lived in a sheltered, close-knit Catholic family. After college graduation, Jean got an executive position with the largest accounting firm in the nation. She dearly loved to shock fiends and acquaintances as she weaved in and out of traffic on her way to and from her downtown office on her Harley Davidson motorcycle. Gregarious and fun-loving, it seemed as if Jean had achieved the good life at a very early age.

While in college, Jean had spend a year in Ireland where she met Fr. Michael Crowley, the parish priest in a large working-class district. During their long talks, he opened her eyes to a whole new world of poverty, need and loneliness. Eventually she realized that she needed to change her life. In 1977, Jean told her parents that she was going to quit her job and spend two years as a lay missionary in El Salvador. Much as her parents and her brother tried to dissuade her, she felt that God was calling her. She was trained at the Maryknoll Center in New York and went to Guatemala for language training. On August 10, 1979, she moved to El Salvador, a place teeming with civil unrest.

Sister Dorothy Kazel became her guide and friend when Jean first arrived. They were alike in many ways: both cared deeply about people; had unlimited energy, an apparently fearless, spontaneous openness to new challenges and an absolute commitment to stand and fight for their convictions.

In the midst of all the turmoil and anxiety in El Salvador, a remarkable new presence appeared in Jean's life: Archbishop Oscar Romero. He validated everything she had thought or felt about the Catholic Church and gave renewed strength and purpose to her efforts to help the poor of El Salvador. Maryknoll sister, Ita Ford, decided to leave Chile where she had worked for many years and go to El Salvador. Sister Carla Piette came with Ita. Their presence brought a fresh infusion of energy and spirit into the small, beleaguered community of American missionaries. After Romero's death, Ita was a new role model for Jean. One stormy night while Ita and Carla were driving a refugee to safety, a flash flood hit their truck. Carla pushed Ita out of the window to safety, but Carla drowned. Maryknoll then sent Sister Maura Clarke to be Ita's new companion. Maura had spent most of her life working in Nicaragua. She was older than the rest at 49.

There was much killing going on at this point- women and children were fleeing from their homes, and the missionaries were exhausted trying to move them and supply them with food. In 1980, all four of the women had made trips out of the country, visiting family and friends, but chose to return to help the poor and to give them hope in a desperate situation. They knew they might be killed. On December 2, 1980, the four women were reported missing. Their van was located, then their grave was discovered. The women had been raped and shot execution-style in the back of the head. Their American families fought for justice for many years afterward. Five men who were members of the Salvadoran National Guard were eventually accused. However, there was a cover up while the US government continued to support the military which was responsible, not only for these killings but for the murders of thousands of Salvadoran peasants who threatened the comfortable lifestyle of the ruling class.

Our Lady of Guadalupe

In 1531, a "Lady from Heaven" appeared to a poor Aztec Indian, Juan Diego, at Tepayac, a hill northwest of Mexico City with a message of love, compassion and a promise of universal help and protection. She instructed him to have the bishop build a temple on the site. The bishop did not believe Juan until after the third apparition when the Lady presented Juan with roses blooming out of season and instructed him to take them to the bishop. Juan wrapped the roses in his tilma made of rough cactus cloth and when he unveiled them for the bishop, the roses scattered on the floor and the image of Mary was on the tilma.

Just ten years before, in 1521, the capital city of the Aztec Empire had fallen under Spanish forces. For centuries, the Aztecs had professed a polytheistic religion that practiced human sacrifices. In less than 20 years, 9 million of the native inhabitants were converted to Christianity. In 1946, Pope Pius XII declared our Lady of Guadalupe the Patroness of the Americas. An estimated ten million visitors travel yearly to her Basilica in Mexico City.