



Mary's Pence News

Spring 2010 Newsletter

Hospitality and Justice

This year Mary's Pence gave grants to several organizations that shelter vulnerable women and families. They each provide for immediate needs, fulfilling our call to charity. In addition, each works to change the system in some way, to make this form of charity less needed in the future, fulfilling the call to justice.

Border Crossings Experiences

Casa Guadalupana House of Hospitality, St. Paul MN

There have been a large number of Latinos that have migrated to the cold northern city of St. Paul. Casa Guadalupana meets immediate needs by providing food and medicine. Their requests have tripled over the last year.



Members of church communities gather with families of Casa Guadalupana to learn about the lives and struggles of immigrants.

To highlight the issues of poverty and immigration in the community Casa Guadalupana hosts border-crossing advocacy trainings weekly for church and community groups.

In the border-crossing advocacy sessions, which are 4-5 hours, the participants learn about the difference between justice and charity and the myths and realities of immigration. Families who are or have used the services of the home share their stories about poverty and immigration. Immigration lawyers explain the immigration laws, why it is difficult to come here legally and the difficulty of bringing family members here. Finally, participants share a meal with the residents of the home, prepared by the residents.

By holding up the mirror for the community Casa Guadalupana is changing the community and its understanding of

poverty and immigration issues, a necessity for meaningful policy change.

From the Street to Social Action

Community of the Beloved, Asheville, North Carolina

The Community of the Beloved is a day home for people living on the streets. It provides those living in poverty with a safe place to build community, understand their own experiences, and share their gifts. Community of the Beloved goes directly to where people are--on the streets. They spend time getting to know people as individuals, not a number or a case. Once relationships are established people are invited to the community house. The community house is not institutional space. It is their space. The rooms and resources are at their disposal and they are the leaders.

The community house creates a safe place for sharing of stories. As stories are shared individuals discover they know a lot about oppression, and about the systems that they have to interact with on a daily basis, such as the de-

We begin to grow personally and to see ourselves as agents of social change.

partment of social services, welfare, food stamps, housing, and healthcare. This understanding enables them to name problems with these systems. They begin to claim their own voices as their stories are validated.

Here is a story shared by Amy Cantrell, staff at the Community of the Beloved, about claiming voice:

Recently in a community discussion Rodney and Connie shared their experiences of being harassed by the police in Pritchard Park in a discussion we had about knowing our rights. Our homeless friends are routinely pulled aside, made to sit, and are carded by the police for no reason other than that they are homeless. This makes for a climate of harassment meant to intimidate folks on the street. Rodney and Connie cooperated by showing their ID cards but would not sit down, which is their right. It was their means of protesting this policy of profiling. It reminds me of the

garbage workers in Memphis carrying signs reading: "I am a man!" Rodney and Connie asserted their rights and said: "I am human!"

Any member of the community can identify a problem that they see and want to do something about. As others express interest in the topic they form a Change Team. The team names the problem and then begins to formulate actions and solutions that will make a difference. Teams form around things like public transportation, healthcare, youth violence and use of public space (parks, restrooms, etc.) by poor and homeless people. The teams have led others in protest, spoken to officials with the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness, worked to have public restrooms opened, shared meals in the public parks, and supported and accompanied one another to medical and court appointments where they've spoken truth to healthcare professionals and judges.

Using the Popular Education model Community of the Beloved members build understanding, skills and courage to tackle issues in the community.

Building Skills for Social Change

Hagar's House, New Orleans, Louisiana

Hagar's House meets the immediate housing and safety needs of women and children in New Orleans. The average stay for women and families is 6 to 12 months. Community is an essential part of the experience. During her stay, each woman creates an empowerment plan that she defines and directs.

At the same time, Hagar's House goal is to challenge systemic poverty in the greater New Orleans area by working to undo the root causes of poverty and homelessness—those that specifically affect residents at Hagar's House. They do this through increasing understanding and skills of residents to challenge the system, and by creating ways to challenge it with the support of community.

At its weekly movie night, Hagar's House recently began showing movies - both fiction and documentaries - with politically provocative plots and questions. After the film, someone who has previewed the movie facilitates conversation. The goal is to gradually and gently create a space where social justice discussions are a regular part of life.

Each Monday night, residents gather for a House Circle or community meeting led by a different resident each week. The facilitator ends each circle with a current event, poetry, or question that she wants to discuss with the house.

The staff members of Hagar's House are involved in many aspects of community life in New Orleans. Residents regularly join staff at events led by other social justice and human rights groups. For example, the house participated in a film and discussion on the Freedom Riders, organized by the New Orleans Human Rights Film Fest. Recently both the children and adults of the house attended a youth-led music and educational event on connections between



Mother and daughter work on their plot in an organic garden at Hagar's House. Gardening builds community and grows food in a local sustainable way.

the struggles, rebuilding, music, and spirituality of Haiti and New Orleans.

Hagar's House is instituting training which will include such topics as nonviolent communication, letter writing campaigns, press releases, organizing vigils or demonstrations, street theatre, and other skills involved in executing both advocacy campaigns and nonviolent direct actions. Current residents will determine what the training will include based on their needs, interests, and motivations.

The women of Hagar's House are working on individual growth and are increasing their influence in the community.

Sign Up for the New Mary's Pence E-Newsletter!

In March we published our first monthly eNews. Each issue will highlight grantees, incorporate reflections, highlight social justice issues, and share ways that you can help support Mary's Pence through action.

To share your email address, write to inbox@maryspence.org or call us at 718-720-8040.



ESPERA Funds: Feeding the Community

Cuentepec, Mexico

Choose a path, however narrow and crooked, that you can walk with love and reverence. -Thoreau

Climbing the winding road to an indigenous village in the highlands of central Mexico, Gilda Larios of Mary's Pence was greeted half way up the path by Felipa. This Nahuatl woman had been organizing the women of her community to assess its needs. Food and the welfare of children, not surprisingly, are top priorities. The price of tortillas and beans has risen beyond the community's reach. The women were complaining of losing what little control they had over the nutrition of their children. Traditional ways of preparing food are becoming more costly than potato chips, loaves of tasteless, spongy white bread, tins of expensive powdered milk and Twinkies. The community's health and vitality, its future, is being sacrificed to the global food industry.

The women are excited about the ESPERA Fund and the new dimension of hope it is creating within the group. Their imagination soon overtakes their complaints. With the ESPERA Fund they will be able to cultivate their own financial security. And with that, they decide, yes, they will assume their traditional power to feed the community by dedicating their efforts to building, managing and owning a community bakery. This is the wisdom of the ESPERA Fund.

To appreciate the complexity of this decision to partner with the ESPERA Fund, we have to walk a bit further into the life of this village. The dream of evolving the life-work of a community by training women in local market economies comes face to face with the demands and discipline of learning to manage money collectively. Alert to the signs of the times, it is the art of presence to the creativity of the common good. In this community every cent is counted twice, each school notebook a family trophy, a treasure mined from the fields of family labor. Taking risks for the love of family and community is what women do. How could we not reverence such a path?

Learning to create adobe stoves, to garner the intelligence



The women of Cuentepec, Mexico find support in working together. Their community struggles with the high cost of beans and corn, which is being displaced by cheaper white bread and snacks.

of the young people who have not yet left to labor in the United States, to guide the confidence of women to experience the openness needed to negotiate the "how-to" of savings and loans is no small commitment. And that only begins to fill out the story of these women's lives, particularly Felipa's life. She feeds us too.

Her husband migrates north each year to work in the fields that nourish our appetite. The money earned is to fulfill the dream of his youngest daughter studying to become a nurse. As we all know, sacrifices don't always work out as parents have planned. Last year a furious Felipa received back into her home her pregnant daughter who had dropped out of school.

It may take a village to raise this new child. It takes a woman, though, to raise a village. We invite you to walk in "solidarity" with Felipa and her community to feed their families and nourish a culture. And, as you can imagine, you will be meeting them half way up.

- Gilda Larios is Mary's Pence ESPERA Fund Facilitator and lives in Mexico City.

An ESPERA Partner in Guatemala

Asociación de Mujeres Sembradoras de Esperanza

The indigenous women of Asociación de Mujeres Sembradoras de Esperanza, of Santa Cruz de Quiche, Guatemala have been working on organizing and supporting each other for seven years. The Asociación is made up of 14 groups from local communities, and they are Mary's Pence's newest ESPERA Fund Partner.

With an initial \$5,000 grant, 40 women in two communities

have received loans of 1,000 quetzals. With these loans the women have purchased animals for breeding, supplies for their corn crops and treats for their families. Mary's Pence will work with the women of the Asociación to expand the fund to reach more women over the next couple of years.

In Guatemala, women seldom hold property or have access to resources. These loans provide a way for women to increase the prosperity of their families and gain some personal independence. Each group in the Asociación has a leadership team which visits the women who receive

loans to provide support. The Asociación was founded by Sr. Marucha, a local indigenous woman. She has worked with the women to form as a group, develop their spirituality and gain leadership skills. When the groups first formed, women were reluctant to speak in a group. During a recent visit with Mary's Pence Fund Facilitator Gilda Larios and Executive Director Katherine Wojtan, groups created agendas, told their stories, and frequently translated the local language, Quiche, to Spanish.

It is a privilege to be a part of the journey that these women are taking to improve their communities and gain economic security. As donors, you are part of that journey.

During this visit, women shared their stories of the difficulties of their daily lives and how they still have anger and fear from the events of the armed conflict of the '80s. One woman told how she survived by hiding among dead bodies, and how, after finding her parents a couple days later, they were so traumatized they did not know their own children.

It is a privilege to be a part of the journey that these women are taking to improve their communities and gain economic security. As donors, you are part of that journey.



Sister Maruca, an indigenous woman of the region, has worked for seven years with the women of the Asociación, forming strong local groups where women learn to have a voice in their community and family.

ESPERA Funds are a grant given to a women's network to create a local lending pool. Mary's Pence supports the network during its first years with consultation, accompaniment, and funds for meetings, training and coordination. Women have invested in such endeavors as agriculture, retail shops, production of personal care products made with indigenous plants, bakeries, ceramic production and sewing enterprises. When women have resources their children are fed and attend school, and their communities thrive. See a four minute video on ESPERA Funds at <http://www.maryspence.org/videos.html>.



Each women's group that is part of the network elects a leader to represent them on this council.

Social Services for Social Change

Supporting Latina Food Vendors

This year one of Mary's Pence's grants helped support Common Law's work with VAMOS Unidos, a Latino/a Bronx based community group working toward economic and racial justice for street vendors in New York City.

Common Law was founded by attorneys seeking to use their legal resources to increase community organizing. Their unique model utilizes a union-like arrangement: Common Law provides free legal services and legal education to all members of their partner organization. Co-founder Jay Kim explains that "stronger, more informed members leads to more powerful and sustained organizing."

Through their partnership with VAMOS Unidos, Common Law serves food vendors supporting their families by selling homemade foods on New York City streets. Most of the vendors must work "illegally" because of the exception-

ally low cap on permits. There are only 3,000 permits for 20,000 food vendors in New York City!

As VAMOS Unidos vendors organize to increase the number of food vending permits in New York City, Common Law supports individual VAMOS Unidos members by representing them in court. Vending violations can cost hundreds of dollars; a violation for “vending without a permit” carries a \$1,000 fine!

Thus far, Common Law has defended against 150 violations and saved VAMOS Unidos vendors over \$50,000 in fines. The vendors are greatly encouraged by the victories, and continue to hold rallies throughout the city, in their churches and on the steps of City Hall.

In addition, Common Law supports the work of “Picture the Homeless” as their members fight to increase and preserve affordable housing in New York City. In the fall, Common Law will add “Communities Against Anti-Asian Violence” (CAAHV) to its list of partners.

Common Law was founded in 2007 over a kitchen table. Three friends in their third year of law school asked one another “how could legal services empower clients?” Co-



Latina food vendors in New York City struggle due to an inadequate number of permits. Inset: Karen Gargamelli, Mike Wang and Jay Kim founded Common Law in 2007 when they were law students. Today, they can help vendors like these empower themselves through legal action.

founder Karen Gargamelli recalls, “We were not interested in providing charity to the poor. We believed then, as we do now, in providing social services for social change.”

Toward a Compassionate and Just World

With spring comes the end of my tenure as board president for Mary’s Pence. It has been my honor and pleasure to serve as president of Mary’s Pence these past two years. We have seen many changes due to the efforts of our current staff and board members along with the accomplishments of those who supported us in the past. We always build on the shoulders of those women who have walked before us and this includes all of our faithful donors. However, I am particularly grateful to have worked with an enthusiastic board, director and staff who have brought to life the vision of ESPERA Funds for women in Central America.

For me, this has been an opportunity to participate in a process that changes social systems. While I have always understood the immediate need for charity, it is the chance to fix the underlying problem that has fascinated me. It brings to mind the example of Moses and Pharaoh. If Moses had asked Pharaoh for higher pay, better working conditions and benefits – that would have been charity. But Moses demanded “Let my people go!” and changed the system – that is social justice. That is creating a change in the way things are, or systemic change.

As a theology professor, I watch my students grapple with what they perceive as their “blessings” in life or being considered “more fortunate.” Initially this explains their good nutrition, health, excellent education, etc. But in the face of their experience as mentors in schools in low income neighborhoods in the Twin Cities they are faced with the inequities of our educational and economic systems. They are challenged to go deeper and examine the root causes of their “blessings.” Are they from God? Or are

they the result of unfair economic systems that we have set up? For example, good education is paid for by property taxes. Good student/teacher ratios are the result of living in neighborhoods with higher property values. This is not a blessing from God but a way that we have structured our educational system.

What other “blessings” are actually the result of similar systems that preference one group over another?

In this season of spring and renewal, I am reminded that justice is about resurrection. The root meaning of resurrection is “to stand up,” “to stand with,” or “to stand for.” Once women are supported within their community, with ESPERA Funds, they become empowered to create businesses that support themselves and their families. Women and their families are resurrected out of poverty. Ultimately, women become a voice in the governance of the community. With the participation of women, community rules, laws and issues of importance are changed. When more voices are heard, the needs of everyone can be considered in community decisions. This is what we are called to do. This brings all of us to a more human life. We are all connected.

My heartfelt thanks to all of you who support Mary’s Pence ESPERA Funds and our on-going Ministry Grant Program. We are grateful that you continue to accompany us on this journey toward a more compassionate and just world.

Roxanne Meshar
Outgoing President, Mary’s Pence



Relationships are Our Greatest Asset

Relationships are our greatest asset, and Mary's Pence is asking you to share yours with us. Would you be willing to host a Mary's Pence Giving Circle? We supply an agenda and talking points, a six minute DVD telling the story of Concertacion de Mujeres de Suchitoto (ESPERA Fund in El Salvador) and handouts that summarize what we do. You invite friends, and provide a location and light refreshments, and encourage your friends to support Mary's Pence.

We have a goal of hosting 52 circles this year, which will introduce 500 or more new people to Mary's Pence. Our goal is realistic, and will have a big impact.



Members of a Staten Island parish gather to learn about Mary's Pence.

Photo by Justine Cudel

Can We Count on You?

- Consilia Karli, Incoming President

What if a percentage of every purchase you made online went to support our cause? Or if Mary's Pence earned a donation every time you searched the internet? Well, now it can!

GoodShop.com is a new online resource that donates up to 30 percent of each purchase to your favorite cause. Hundreds of stores including Amazon, Target, Gap, Best Buy, ebay, Macy's and Barnes & Noble participate. Every time you place an order, you'll be supporting Mary's Pence.

GoodSearch.com is a new Yahoo-powered search engine that donates half its advertising revenue, about a penny per search, to the charities its users designate.

You can also download the GoodSearch/Mary's Pence toolbar, and Mary's Pence will earn money every time you shop and search online - even if you forget to go to GoodShop or GoodSearch first! Add the toolbar at <http://www.goodsearch.com/toolbar/marys-pence>.

Not Only for the Wealthy: Planned Giving

Planned Giving is a non-cash donation, such as:

- A bequest
- Stock donation
- Beneficiary named on a life insurance policy or IRA account

Usually all that is needed is Mary's Pence's Employer ID (36-3556481). If you need the 990 or annual report we will supply them. Let us know if you support Mary's Pence in any of these ways, since it aids our planning.

Share Your Talents

Do you have connections that could spread the word? Of Mary's Pence mission, it needs to be heard!
Do you do research on internet or in books?
Do you write articles, blogs, or reflections with hooks? What is your interest? Do let us know!
We'd love to involve you, so dip in your toe!
Call us right now before you forget,
At 718-720-8040 and we'll be all set!

Board and Staff

Rosa Castillo, *Los Angeles, CA*
Elise DeGooyer, Secretary, *Seattle, WA*
Consilia Karli, President, *Edison, NJ*
Gilda Larios, ESPERA Fund Facilitator
Anne Leibig, *Dungannon, VA*
Roxanne Meshar, *Minneapolis, MN*
Pat Rogucky, *Baltimore, MD*
Roxanne Smith, Treasurer, *Minneapolis, MN*
Cindy Sullivan, Vice President, *St. Louis, MO*
Katherine Wojtan, Executive Director
Nicole Wright, Office Manager

We are a grassroots community that promotes Catholic social change by directing donated resources to small women's projects in the Americas.

The Mary's Pence Newsletter is published twice a year. Comments and suggestions are welcome.

Mary's Pence
1000 Richmond Terrace G-304
Staten Island, NY 10301
718-720-8040
inbox@maryspence.org
www.maryspence.org

Reflection

By Diann Neu

Imagine the many ways you are connected to women around the world through Mary's Pence. This reflection imagines us hand in hand, reaching out and connecting with women throughout the Americas. It offers four blessings: the first to you, the second to Mary's Pence, the third to justice workers, and the fourth to the new season.

Preparation

Choose your favorite hand-made object, and put it in a special place near you. Pick a treasured gift, a pottery vessel, a weaving, a quilt, jewelry, an article of clothing, or photos and newsletters from Mary's Pence. Invite a friend or several to join you if you like. Play music of your choice if you wish. Rest your body in a comfortable place, relax, and imagine.

Centering

Look at your hands. Clasp them together. Imagine that you are hand in hand with the women of Mary's Pence near and far. Through the centuries, the creative and healing power of the Divine Holy One has been represented through the gestures of the human hand and fingers. Let us bless these hands.

The First Blessing – You

Let us dedicate this first blessing to you. We give thanks for the many ways you give a hand to extend the work of Mary's Pence. Take a few minutes while you notice your hands to think of your power and gentleness, and of the incredible works you have done.

Blessed are these hands when they nurture creativity and cradle new life.

Blessed are these hands when they work together for an end to violence and poverty.

Blessed are these hands when they support the many efforts of justice-making.

The Second Blessing – Mary's Pence

Let us offer this second blessing in praise of our community of Mary's Pence. While you notice your hands, photos, objects, think of the many ways you and the women of Mary's Pence join hand in hand.

Blessed are these hands when they embrace with love, respect, and dignity.

Blessed are these hands when they help a community start an ESPERA fund or a giving circle.

Blessed are these hands when they comfort those who are hungry, thirsty, and needing work or shelter.

The Third Blessing – Justice Workers

Let us pray this third blessing in thanksgiving for those who work for justice. While you meditate on hands, remember those whose hands have brought about change.

Blessed are these hands when they tend community gardens to feed the hungry and nurture the earth.

Blessed are these hands when they are raised in anger to protest the destruction of Planet Earth.

Blessed are these hands when they stop violence, vote for equality, bring about social change.

The Fourth Blessing – A New Season

Let us enjoy this fourth blessing remembering the spirit of this season. While you notice your hands, think of all the emotions that you experience: wonder, alienation, doubt, excitement, dread, ecstasy, hope. Acknowledge these feelings as part of yourself.

Blessed are these hands when they open tightly clenched fists to let go of fears and reach out with trust.

Blessed are these hands when they take hold of new goals for personal health and social justice.

Blessed are these hands when (add your own).

Closing

Look at your hands. Give thanks for all the ways you are hand in hand with the women of Mary's Pence near and far. Hand in hand – imagine! The Divine Holy One, Sophia-Wisdom, walks hand in hand with her sisters.



- Diann L. Neu, D.Min., was a Mary's Pence board member from 2005-April 2010. She is cofounder and co-director of WATER, The Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual in Silver Spring, MD. dneu@hers.com

Working Against Domestic Violence in Nicaragua

Zoraida Sosa Sanchez
Managua, Nicaragua

My name is Zoraida Sosa Sanchez. I am fifty years old and I work with an organization called Women and Community, which was founded ten years ago. The organization works with women to provide support in situations of domestic violence. The organization does more than just comfort the women—rather, we tell them their rights and what they can do for themselves, and we support them in those endeavors.

Here in Nicaragua the rate of domestic abuse is very high, and on top of this there is also the issue of sexual abuse. A lot of this has to do with the patriarchal culture and the norms of our society in regards to gender roles. These roles are reinforced by the schools, government, and church, and because of them women are eager to enter into and then preserve their marriages, regardless of violence. Women are concerned with their families, but do not take care of them selves. Also, they do not have a voice in their own homes, and often have to wait for their husbands to make decisions.

Therefore, our work is to awaken the consciousness of the women so that they recognize themselves as a person, and begin to demand the respect and space that they need.

Here, violence is a real problem, and as a mother, daughter, and grandmother, I have experienced violence and sexual abuse since I was a child. Because of this, I am convinced that if a woman does not try to change, nothing else will change. On the other hand, if a woman begins to change, she demands a change in others and teaches them to respect and include her. Women need to learn to demand respect and visibility, and from this they will affect change in their sons, brothers, husbands, and families.

For me, this is very important, and I feel that the women of the world are being more vocal. It is evident that the patriarchal system is feeling threatened, and in Nicaragua the men are responding the only way they know how: violence. There has been an increase of the killing of women recently, and it is only increasing. I hope that my words help—I speak them from my own experience and from my heart.

Zoraida Sosa Sanchez lives in Managua, Nicaragua and works with an organization called Mujer y Comunidad. She served as a coordinator for one of Mary's Pence first ESPERA Funds, the Red de Mujeres Nicarahault.



Mary's Pence News

International Women's Day Celebration in NYC with Women of Latin America

On March 8th Mary's Pence hosted a gathering of women in New York City. Donors and staff came together to hear the stories of indigenous women from Ecuador, Guatemala and Bolivia. The women are participants of the learning centers of the Salesian Sisters in those countries. They and the Sisters were in New York to participate in the UN Commission on the Status of Women. Mary's Pence partially funded their trip.



Photo by Justine Cudel

Maria Ayda Azogue Tixilema of Ecuador currently teaches hand crafts. She is going to school to become a kindergarten teacher.

The Salesian Sisters run The Center for Promotion of Women, which supported her development.

Women and Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America

Leadership Council of Women Religious (LCWR) has mounted an exhibit on the rich history and contributions of Catholic sisters in the United States. Through photographs, artifacts and documentary material drawn from the archives of many congregations, this exhibit tells how sisters played a vital role in shaping America.

- Cleveland, Ohio, May 2010 - Aug. 2010
 - New York City, Sep. 2010 - Jan. 22, 2011
 - Dubuque, Iowa, Feb. - April 2011
 - South Bend, Indiana, Sep. 2011 - Dec. 2011
- For information visit: <http://www.womenandspirit.org>

Upcoming Giving Circles

If you live in the area we would love to connect you with the local hosts of Giving Circles.

- Cindy Sullivan, St. Louis MO - May 15
- Benedictine University at Springfield, Fr. Steven Janoski, Springfield, MO - May 18
- Corinne Muellen, Baldwinsville, NY - May 25
- Judy Schiavo, Hastings-on-Hudson, NY - May 29
- Roxanne Meshar, Minneapolis, MN - June 4
- Rosa Castillo, Los Angeles, NV - June 6
- Katherine Wojtan, San Fransisco - June 9
- Anne Leibig, Dungannon VA - June 21