

Providence in Action

The Congregation of Divine Providence believes in advocating for the marginalized. It works to become more aware of inequalities and denounce pervasive injustice and violence. ... The Sisters as individuals and small groups raise awareness of people's needs in various ways within the San Antonio community and nationwide.

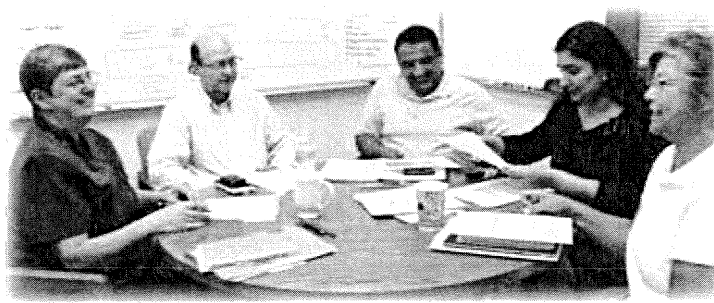
A prime example of how the Sisters of Divine Providence practice their advocacy is through the decades of dedication, hard work and efforts put forth by Sisters Christine Stephens and Pearl Ceasar. For over 30 years, these women of faith have worked diligently to better the lives of thousands wanting for basic human needs and better education, infrastructure and wages. Their work and that of others from the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) has created a domino effect nation-wide that has trained thousands of ordinary citizens to be leaders and organize to be heard and bring about change. Hundreds of communities have become stronger, more viable and visible. IAF is a national network of organizers acknowledged by the Catholic Bishops to train and engage citizens within not only Catholic parishes and surrounding communities but from congregations of many faith traditions, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Unitarian, to help meet the needs of their area.

Sisters Christine and Pearl have worked in succession on various projects. On many occasions Sister Christine made the initial contact and established the ground work with organizations that call on IAF. Once the leaders were identified and needs were evaluated, Sister Pearl would take the lead and see the project through. An excellent example of this work relationship is through the roles each played in developing one of the premier organizations of the IAF that has served as a model to subsequent efforts: Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS) based in San Antonio, Texas. Sister Christine worked with COPS between 1980 and 1984. COPS encompasses leaders in 26 parishes in the predominantly low-income, Hispanic West Side and South Side of San Antonio.

COPS has brought in over \$2 billion for water, sewer and infrastructure into low-income neighborhoods. It has brought about the demolition of substandard housing and the rebuilding of new housing. It has begun to direct economic development funds toward poor inner-city neighborhoods.

Sisters Christine and Pearl's roles in organizing COPS continue to bear fruit. One of many successful examples is Project QUEST. While Lead Organizer in San Antonio, Sister Pearl worked with the leaders of COPS and The Metro Alliance to research and develop QUEST. Sister Pearl took on the responsibility as QUEST's Executive Director in September 2012. This vibrant, non-profit organization is a primary economic development broker. It provides critical support, ex-

pertise, education and resources to develop highly qualified employees for in-demand occupations that offer a living wage, benefits and opportunities for a career path.



Sister Pearl meets with the QUEST staff.

This past October, another organization derived from IAF, Valley Interfaith, based in the Rio Grande

Valley of Texas bordering Mexico, celebrated 30 years of leadership and success. When Sister Christine Stephens was called to the Rio Grande Valley in the early 1980's she was met with the concern of the residents. For years, hundreds of thousands of families who had built their own homes on small land tracts lived in developing world country conditions that included lack of potable water, sewage services and paved streets. The use of outhouses was prevalent. Any generous rainfall, which is normally a blessing, became a problem for these neighborhoods because the rain caused the outhouses to overflow and the waste blended in with the mud. The school buses could not enter these neighborhoods due to the mud and lack of paved streets so the children were forced to walk in the mud and board the busses and attend school muddy and reeking with odors from the waste water. Consequently, diseases such as cholera, tuberculosis and others were rampant in these communities.

Sister Christine trained the community's leaders to identify and address their concerns and present them to their state officials. For the next five years she worked with five to six thousand people to make the politicians take notice not only of the urgent need for

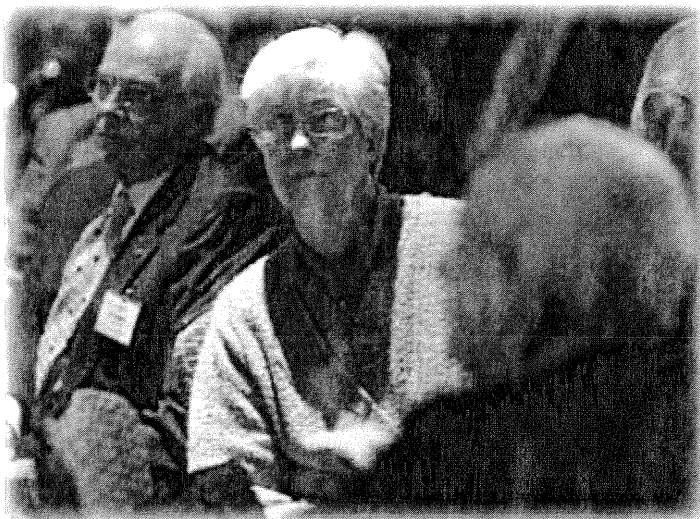
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infrastructure but health care, education and immigration issues as well. They drew the attention of local and state officials, such as Governor Mark White and Lt. Governor Bill Hobby. Hobby visited las colonias to assess the problems in the various Rio Grande Valley neighborhoods and returned to the state capitol to design a bond package that would go to the state for a vote. The initial bond passed, but changes came years later. By 1990 Sister Pearl replaced Sister Christine and began working with Valley Interfaith to make the initial funding and improvements come to fruition. Valley Interfaith has brought over \$700 million into the Valley to provide water access, sewer services, drainage and paved roads to its more than 160,000 colonia residents. Statewide, over \$1 billion dollars was leveraged for residents living along the Texas-Mexico border. The Rio Grande Valley's colonias are completely transformed with paved streets, gutters and running water and the important issues of education, healthcare and

immigration continue to be advocated and addressed.

Sister Christine has trained and developed leaders throughout the United States: Texas, California, Mississippi, Iowa, Nebraska, Arizona, and Nevada. These leaders have organized groups, similar to COPS and Valley Interfaith, and give the marginalized a voice in creating better job training and education, raising the standard of living and being the voice of the scared and silent. She served on the National Executive Committee of IAF from 1999 to 2008 when she became one of four National Co-Directors until 2012. Presently she serves as Co-Director of the West/Southwest IAF region.



Sister Christine

These exceptional women of faith have been able to see beyond what the human eye can see or limitations assumed by society. They see through the eyes of Christ and make it their business to touch and believe in the spirit that lies within each of us regardless of origin, education, or economics. They along with many of their fellow sisters have put their beliefs into action.

San Antonio CDP

Providence Comes First

The Congregation of Divine Providence embraces its multiculturalism. Our 14 Sisters in the México region join their country's tradition of dedicating the first of every month to Divine Providence. Every noon Mass on the first of every month throughout México is in honor of Divine Providence. Therefore, our sisters and the families in Querétaro and the surrounding areas attend these masses without fail. This monthly custom re-starts each year on December 31. Every family or community takes their twelve candles that will be used monthly to Mass where these are blessed. A candle is lit each first day of the month at home and the following prayer to Divine Providence is recited:

Divine Providence assists us at all times so that we will not lack in faith, shelter, clothing, and sustenance nor the Sacraments in our last moments.



This lovely custom in México is one we all could imitate to express our belief that PROVIDENCE will see us through every situation and circumstance. The rich faith history of México is proof that PROVIDENCE provides.