

# Sister Christine Stephens Passes Away

By Steve Taylor  
July 21, 2019



San Antonio, Texas – Sister Christine Stephens, a key player in the Industrial Areas Foundation, has passed away. She was 78 years old.

Stephens served on the National Executive Committee of IAF from 1999 to 2008 when she became one of four National Co-Directors until 2012. Most recently she served as Co-Director of the West/Southwest IAF region.

Among her accomplishments was establishing IAF organizations across Texas, including Valley Interfaith in the Rio Grande Valley.

Indeed, Stephens was lead organizer for Valley Interfaith during the period in the late 1980s when state legislation brought millions of dollars to the Valley for water and wastewater in the region's colonias.

She also guided the development of new West/Southwest IAF organizations in Louisiana and mentored organizers across the West/Southwest of the United States.

The *Rio Grande Guardian* will have a tribute story about Sister Stephens in the coming days.

Here is her obituary:

### **SISTER CHRISTINE STEPHENS, CDP**

Sister Christine Stephens, CDP entered eternal life on July 18, 2019 at the age of 78. She was the younger of two daughters born to Walter Irving and Frances Louise (Bulian) Stephens.

She was born December 22, 1940 in Austin, Texas and was given the baptismal name, Mary Christine. She entered the Congregation of Divine Providence on September 7, 1962 and professed first vows as a Sister of Divine Providence on June 22, 1964.

Sister Christine graduated from the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas with a Bachelor of Arts in Economics prior to entering Our Lady of the Lake Convent. She later earned a Master of Arts in History from St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas.



Sister Christine attributes her faith formation to her parents who set the example of perseverance and seeking justice for one's family and community. Her father was a member of the pipe fitters union. This foundation served Sister Christine in her first seven years as a teacher, then as a social worker for eight years, and expanded and deepened when she became an organizer 45 years ago.

Sister Christine did not choose organizing as a ministry, it chose her. She was spotted by her now close friend and mentor, Ernesto Cortés, Jr., who said it was her anger that caught his attention. That was the first time she viewed her anger in a positive light. The work of justice was at the heart of her ministry and her life. Her work with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) was the vehicle to funnel her anger against injustice.

Sister Christine's commitment to identifying, training and transforming leaders and organizers throughout the country worked to bring millions of dollars for water and waste water to the colonias along the Texas/Mexico border, was instrumental in developing the Alliance School strategy that impacted hundreds of schools across the country, plus the creation of nationally renowned job training programs modeled after Project QUEST in San Antonio. She served as lead organizer in the Rio Grande Valley with Valley Interfaith in the 80's when the organization passed the 1989 Colonia's Bill that brought millions of dollars to Rio Grande Valley colonias for water and waste water and supervised VIF for decades.

Her advocacy and work during the past four decades were manifest in her various roles as National IAF Co-Director and supervisor of organizations across the IAF Network. Her organizing career began in Houston and then as lead organizer of C.O.P.S. in San Antonio.

She enjoyed seeing ordinary leaders who worked across multi-faith traditions, economic lines, and race do extraordinary things in their communities. She breathed and lived the Gospel values of justice and leaves a legacy to be continued. She had an enduring faith in the values of democracy.

She is survived by her sister Sarah Howell, and all her Sisters of Divine Providence. She is also survived by her niece Angela Duhon (William), their children, Emma and Nathaniel. She was preceded in death by her parents Walter and Frances Stephens.

The Rosary is Thursday, July 25, 2019 at 4:00 p.m. and the Wake is at 6:30 p.m. A Mass of Resurrection will be Friday, July 26, 2019 at 10:30 a.m. All services will be in Sacred Heart Chapel, next to Our Lady of the Lake Convent Center, 515 S. W. 24<sup>th</sup> Street, San Antonio, Texas 78207.

In lieu of flowers, you may make a memorial contribution to the Sisters of Divine Providence, 515 S.W. 24<sup>th</sup> Street, San Antonio, TX 78207-4619.