

Mary's Pence
275 East 4th Street, Suite 707
St. Paul, MN 55101
www.maryspence.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Anna Zaros, Development Liaison
Tel: 651-788-9869
Cell Phone: 612-518-4860
Email: anna@maryspence.org

Mary's Pence Hosts Board Meeting of International Women Leaders
*Progressive Non-Profit Organization Discusses Future of Funding
Local Women's Initiatives in the Americas*

St. Paul, MN -- October 16, 2014 -- Mary's Pence, a grassroots organization that directs donated resources to local women's initiatives in the Americas, will be hosting its board, consisting of leaders for women's justice and equality efforts from across the United States and Mexico, for its biannual meeting. The board will meet October 23-26 at the facilities of the Sisters of St. Joseph in St. Paul.

Mary's Pence has provided grants totaling over \$1,500,000, funding more than 500 projects in its 27 year history. The projects support women's physical, social, and economic well-being, with an emphasis on innovation, collaboration, and sustainability. Funding decisions are based on a Catholic tradition of social justice and on feminist values. Examples of funded projects are Casa Guadalupe in St. Paul, which provides shelter and basic needs to homeless families, and Esperanza en Accion in Nicaragua, which connects artisans with fair trade markets where they can receive fair prices for their products.

Another major share of Mary's Pence donations goes to its ESPERA program, working with emerging or existing women's networks by providing community lending pools for women. ESPERA Funds provide seed money for local women's networks, which own and manage the funds and select income-generating projects to invest in. This model of community-based ownership and management circumvents many of the risks associated with micro-lending. Since its inception in 2008, the ESPERA program has funded 1,265 loans for 890 women in six countries – El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua.

Among other tasks, the board will discuss the future of ESPERA and Mary's Pence Grants, as the programs expand to deepen partnerships with the women Mary's Pence works with, including strengthening the business skills of participants in ESPERA and providing technical assistance to Mary's Pence grantees. Furthermore, the board will bring its varied and unique expertise to discuss how to support Mary's Pence's partners in Central America who are experiencing the same increase in violence and drug trafficking that has forced unaccompanied minors to cross the U.S./Mexico border.

Executive Director, Katherine Wojtan, says, "The women we partner with in Central America are experiencing a rise in gang and drug related violence, and this is impacting their work. In some areas they travel by threes, always letting people know where they are going, and traveling with their cell phones in case of trouble. All 6 countries that ESPERA is in are on the list of Major Drug Transit and Drug Producing Countries released by the White House. Immigration, poverty and drug trafficking are interlinked, affecting both Central America, and the United States. Our work of empowering women and helping them and their families to gain economic security, seeks to address the problem at its root."

A fact sheet and list of board members is attached.

###