



Mary's Pence News

Spring 2009 Annual Report Edition

The Long Road to Justice

The anniversary of Oscar Romero's death is fresh in my mind as I prepare this annual report. I am reminded of the words of Bishop Ken Untener's *Romero Prayer* urging those of us who work for change to "take the long view."

Social justice does require the longer view. Charity is like instant gratification on the giving continuum. But anyone who has ever worked in a food pantry, homeless shelter or clothing bank knows that the good feelings don't last.

Before long we begin to ask, "What is going on here?" And in digging deeper we find that it isn't usually a case of bad luck or poor judgment, that injustice is rarely an accident. When some suffer, none of us comes away unscathed.

That's why Mary's Pence is committed to working on the social justice end of the spectrum—creating systemic change and working as close to the roots as possible. We want those who are most affected by a problem to have what they need to find lasting solutions. And that rarely means quick outcomes. Or a clear path.

We recently heard from Friends of Haiti, who used our grant to introduce solar ovens into a rural community so women could start a bakery. This year, they returned to Haiti to find the project in jeopardy. Although the women had been well trained, they lacked ongoing mentoring as the teachers started their own competing bakery.

Worst of all, "the women borrowed money from another organization to buy ingredients, but the recent hurricanes wiped out their crops and they defaulted on their loans, putting a lot of stress on themselves and their families. The basic need for food and the strong desire to have their children educated took precedence in how the money they made was reinvested, or rather not reinvested, in the business."

Thankfully, that is not the end of the story. Although this year's grant was returned, the women still have their



The ESPERA Fund in El Salvador is concentrating on food security projects this year.

ovens and their children's school fees are paid. Friends of Haiti is working with a Haitian trainer to develop a better strategy for doing business ventures with women in rural areas.

"We are currently helping women develop small individual gardens to address food security issues," they explained. "We think that it is best to help with basic needs so the women in the future can start small businesses without the pressure to use credit for necessities rather than develop their businesses."

This is often the face of social change: A great plan, well executed, but with an outcome that is completely unexpected. In the next few pages you'll read our grantees telling in their own words what they learned in the last year. In addition to discovering workable solutions, the experience of reframing "success" is also fairly common.

But these experiences remind us why it is important to risk boldly, learn wisely and adapt along the way. It would be easy to regard the solar oven project as a failure. Instead, we believe it was the blessed start of a long relationship toward justice.

Again, in the words of the *Romero Prayer*, "It may be incomplete but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest."

Katherine Wojtan, Executive Director

In Their Own Words

These pages provide a peek at the lives of women impacted by Mary's Pence grants. Rather than focus on the goals and project description we've focused on the lives and learnings, the adjustments and achievements, and the struggles and sustaining partnerships that your resources made possible.

Traveling with the Turtle: Women's Spirituality and Peacemaking Program, United States

One participant related an experience with a supervisor who was sexually harassing the women in the jail. He made one of his usual comments to her, and she told him that he should not be treating people like that. He paused for a moment and then said to her, "No, I shouldn't." A violent, unjust situation was transformed into a moment of grace. She used the Two Hands of Nonviolence that we had discussed... With one hand, she stood up for herself declaring, "Stop the violence. Stop treating me this way. I am a human being, deserving of your respect." With her other hand, however, she reached out to him: "Whether I like it or not, I am connected to you. You are my brother and I believe that you can do better than that." She spoke her truth with calmness and conviction and it was received. Truly, the Holy One was present in this interaction.

ACCESSO International, Bolivia

Over the past few years, we have witnessed life-changing progress for women and youth as they become aware of, and claim their human rights as persons and as women. They have become more confident within their families and they have become more courageous within their communities. Many of them are furthering their own education for the first time in their lives thanks to their participation in the human rights workshops; they are seeking better employment opportunities and they are exercising their labour rights as employees. They are organizing together in their communities to help themselves collectively and to help other women. They are replicating the human rights workshops to share the knowledge and hope with their fellow citizens. It has been fascinating to observe women in their late teens, as well as women as advanced as 70 years of age, discovering, celebrating and exercising their human rights for the very first time in their lives.



*Clockwise from top:
Paraiban Leaders;
Mujeres y Valores;
ACCESSO
International*



Empowering Paraiban Black Women Leaders, Brazil

After struggling last year with a place to offer the [empowerment] course we have been very pleased with being able to use the Women's Center of the municipal government. This partnership continues to grow. Last September, the municipal government asked us to accompany a group of women in a low-income housing group for two months. The group was so enthusiastic that we have incorporated them into the leadership training courses and continue to meet with them on a weekly basis. This year the municipal government asked us to submit a proposal to work with men and women leaders on gender and violence issues. Our team is excited about these new possibilities to expand our work.

Mujeres y Valores, Nebraska

When I went to my first *Mujeres y Valores* class, I was living in depression as a consequence of abuse. I never went to school (here in the U.S.) to learn English, because my husband didn't let me. I didn't know how

to drive, I didn't know how to make my own decisions. Now, I learned how to drive. I'm in the process of getting my GED. I took classes in English. (I don't know much but at least I'm beginning to understand.) I'm the leader of a Planning Team from which we are giving the *Mujeres y Valores* class today, because I want to help other women like me who live with domestic violence. This is how I've seen several women change their life. For example: one woman came to the class invited by someone else. She was living in a very violent situation with her husband (unfaithful, beating, insults). She was very sad and didn't know what to do. Happy with her progress in class she changed. Now she's a pleasant person; she started working, making decisions and she's another woman now.

Jane Maxfield, Study Grantee

Maintaining credibility, finding genuine self-vitalization, avoiding burnout, maintaining integrity- all these challenges seem to me to be rooted in this larger issue of collective integrity, imagination, and co-creative soul.



Check our website in mid-May for updates on our grant application process.

Casa Guadalupana, Minnesota

We could offer stories about the [homeless] families that we have sheltered....None of these stories would be considered success stories in that lives were dramatically turned around.... But in walking the journey with all of them, transformation and a strengthening of our call to serve occurred in us.

ESPERA Fund, Mexico

Women’s contribution is vital , their daily work is between 16 to 18 hours, going to cut firewood for cooking, carrying water from the river, raising and caring for their children, caregivers; and they wash clothes, dishes, sweep, clean, care for their animals, help in planting and harvesting, carrying food to their husbands in the fields. No doubt the important role played by women in every area, both family and community, but usually women are excluded from public and private decisions and have fewer rights than men.

Nahuat Indigenous Women’s Council, Nicaragua

Many men of the community migrate to Costa Rica in search of jobs, and never return. Because of this, many women are left alone to take care of their families, and young girls cannot go to school due to the poverty in which they live. The goal of the organization is to encourage the participation of women in decisions related to the community and to their own families, as this will lead to a better quality of life for both women and their families. The profits are used to fund their children’s education, because one of our main goals is to provide a better future for the next generation. We wish to see the end of the exploitation of and violence towards indigenous people, and to raise the living standards of our communities.

Shannon Fanning, Study Grantee

I believe that the greatest challenges for those ministering in the church, with a particular focus on lay women professionally trained for ministry, are job stability, adequate financial compensation, respect for their role, and being limited in their ministry by not being allowed to offer the sacraments.

St. Theresa Community Outreach and Empowerment, South Carolina

The insights that I have gained in meeting specific goals, is that things may not work as planned, meaning goals may not be accomplished the same year as expected. I also gained further insight that sometimes adjustments have to be made to actual plans in order to make them work during the year. This will affect my future ministry by leaving “room for additions and/or changes” and foreseeing them as a God-given opportunity.

Mujeres en Tierra Sagrada, Mexico

This year, we are planning to organize a savings box so that we can count on a financial base where money can be retrieved. This money would support the women who need urgent help, slowly allowing us to reach our goal. We are all women of immense faith in God, for God opens the doors for us to do our work and to continue in our mission.

Alternatives With Education, Missouri

We learned that our own ideas of “success” are not feasible for so many [incarcerated] women who come to us with such brokenness. Without family support, many have no “home” to return to and have lost custody

of their children. Without work histories, many are unable to find/keep a job. Without good mental health, many are at the

mercy of their illness and what resources they can manage to access. All this, however, does not mean that they are not “successful.” We learned that managing to remain free of jail and remain free of violence toward self and others are indeed accomplishments, as is the relative peace of mind that

many said they never previously experienced. In a nutshell, we learned that the gulf between our students’ world and ours is immense and success must be measured in small steps. The grant has enabled us to continue reaching these wounded, beautiful women.



Clockwise from top: Tierra Sagrada; Alternatives with Education; Nahuat Indigenous Women



Extending our Reach

With the addition of Gilda Larios as our Grants Advisor in the Southern Hemisphere, Mary's Pence is able to extend its reach through participation in conferences and networks in the region. Here are some highlights of recent programs:

The International Partners in Mission Second Annual Latin American and Caribbean Partner Conference was held December 1-3 in Nicaragua. Gilda joined several grantees from both our Nicaraguan Network and from the ESPERA Fund in El Salvador.

Participants shared information about their own projects and gained valuable information in workshops on business development, financial management, financing, marketing and accountability.

Highlights of the conference were a group site visit to CEPROSI, a Mary's Pence grantee, and a presentation on the ESPERA Fund by Gilda and the two representatives from the program.

The 11th International Conference of Latina American and Caribbean Feminists was held in Mexico City from March 16-20. Approximately 1,500 women from more than 20 countries spent five days exploring a variety of themes that are critical to the well-being of low income women and their families from the region.

The international financial crisis was a central theme. Women shared a variety of experiences and Gilda participated actively in workshops that explored how women are developing and sustaining their own economic projects.

Women from Argentina, El Salvador and Costa Rica described their experiences in working with women to create viable financial initiatives. Gilda made contact with women from several countries that will be valuable for the ESPERA Fund as a collaborative alternative to individual micro-credit programs.

Helping Women Buy the Lake

Most of us are probably familiar with the adage that if you give a person a fish, they will eat for the day, but if you teach a person to fish, they will eat for a lifetime. In the world of women's funds this is how we think: If you give a woman a fish, she will feed her family first and possibly go hungry. If you teach a woman to fish, she will feed her family first until the lake becomes polluted or her fishing rights are taken away. However, if you give women the resources and access to community capital, they will buy the lake, feed their families, keep the lake environmentally clean and have something to pass on for generations to come. As a movement, we are about building sustainable community capital in order to support women and girls who are ready to buy the lake.

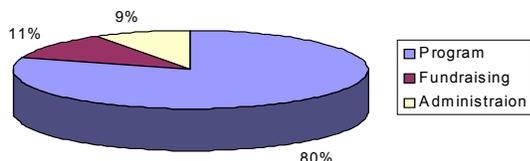
Mary Morten



Profound thanks to actress Ruth Sieber (center) who bought every seat for a Feb. 4 performance of "The Philadelphia Story" at Hillbarn Theater in Foster City, CA and donated it to Mary's Pence. Ruth said, "I strongly believe in the mission of Mary's Pence that includes supplying critical resources and opportunities to women-led projects in communities throughout the Americas. In turn, these women transform their communities and present hope for a more just and peaceful world."

In addition to Katherine Wojtan (l) and board member Consilia Karli (r), former founding member Kaye Ashe and grantee Rebecca Davis spoke at the reception following the show. We welcome other creative fund raising ideas from our donors!

2008 Financials



For additional financial information feel free to contact our office.