

## Stella Maris Clinic

During the 1900s social needs of the growing population of San Antonio's Westside, which was also the neighborhood surrounding Our Lady of the Lake Convent, noisily beckoned for help. The mortality rate of babies, drug addiction, the lack of personal development of children and adults, education and the need for job training existed beyond the average elsewhere. Many families were not surviving these hardships.



Mother Angelique was appalled and unhappy by the reports of poverty and lack of every day needs the families endured. She called upon Sister Nelda Gonzalez to leave the classroom and go to Catholic University in Washington, D.C. to study nursing. On her return Sister set up a small clinic blessed with the name Stella Maris. However, many who needed help could not come for help. So, she began visiting the homes, helping families by providing supplemental food and teaching them methods of sanitation. She taught the mothers how to sterilize bottles for their

babies' milk, bathe them, and otherwise care for them and the other children. She taught them how to handle minor injuries and called upon medical doctors whom she befriended for cases of small pox, tuberculosis, influenza and hepatitis. *(Photo: Sister Nelda Gonzalez and clients at Stella Maris Clinic.)*

Her door to door efforts limited the effectiveness of her service. Realizing the vast area Sister was serving on foot, a retired friend gave Sister her car to get around more efficiently and help transport supplies and people. Two MCDP Sisters helped her teach basic hygiene in the homes. Still more was needed if all who needed help were to get aid. She recruited volunteer Doctors and solicited the San Antonio Health System to send Visiting Nurses, resulting in two nurses who came twice a week. She also protested to and persuaded the School District to build schools in the area served by the Clinic. It took some time, but they were built.

In 1945, over 300 patients were seen at the Clinic each week. In 1975, the number of patients was 800 per week. As many as 12 Doctors were volunteering at this free clinic. Stella Maris was the first clinic on the West Side. The closest other facility offering city or county health care services was 12 miles away. In 1992, the Stella Maris Board decided to lease the building to the Bexar County Health District which was interested in bringing health services to the west side. When the lease was not renewed the building was available for other Providential use.