



## Supporting The Academic Journeys of Sisters from Around The World

By: Michael Hernandez, Mission Support Communications Manager

As a result of the Congregational Chapter of 1987, the Congregation of Divine Providence began exploring the possibility of sending Sisters to Africa and South America. In 1996, the Congregation moved forward with this idea and sent two Sisters to Ghana. However, in 2002, the Congregation had no more Sisters to send for foreign mission work. As a result, the Congregation decided that to continue their foreign mission work, they would begin sponsoring Sisters from foreign ministries to stay at the Our Lady of the Lake Convent while pursuing higher education in the United States.

Sr. Duong Pham of the Lovers of the Holy Cross of Hanoi lived with the Congregation of Divine Providence for the past seven years while studying at the Oblate School of Theology. To highlight and celebrate Sr. Duong's achievement of obtaining her Ph.D., an exit interview was conducted so that she could share her experiences on what it was like coming to the United States, living with the CDPs, and how she plans to use her newfound knowledge back home.

When asked about what the transition was like living with the Congregation, Sr. Duong said that the culture shock had

already worn off as she had already had five years of experience living in the United States due to her time studying at Boston College. During those five years studying in Boston, Sr. Duong noted that the most significant adjustments were learning the language and adapting to the food.

Sr. Duong enjoyed many aspects of her stay with the Congregation. She stated that what impressed her the most was the generosity and kindness shown to her by the CDP Sisters. Despite being away from her home and her Congregation, Sr. Duong noted that there was never a feeling of loneliness. Instead, she always felt included as an honorary Sister of Divine Providence. Sr. Duong even provided examples of how the Sisters made her feel included, like assisting her academically with her coursework, acting as tutors/mentors in her spiritual journey, and including her in CDP events. These acts of generosity and hospitality towards Sr. Duong by the Sisters have further inspired her to do the same for others as she continues her spiritual journey.

Aside from the generosity, Sr. Duong felt welcomed and treated as a CDP Sister; she also expressed immense gratitude for the life experience she gained under the Sisters' influence. The Sisters' impact on Sr. Duong was so influential on her that she cited it as being even more important than the academic knowledge she gained. She views their influences as a treasured gift that she looks forward to taking back to Vietnam to serve her church and the members of her Congregation.

When Sr. Duong returns to Vietnam, she will begin work as a leader of the Novices in her community. In the Spring semester, she will teach two courses at the Theological Institute in her archdiocese. She also hopes to become spiritual director of retreats.

Sr. Duong cited that achieving her Ph.D. here in the United States was her primary objective. This is because a Ph.D. earned here in the United States is seen as more valuable than one earned in Vietnam. Vietnam has been under communist rule for so long, the education system has not progressed to the same level as the United States. When Sr. Duong returns to Vietnam, she will be the first woman with a Ph.D. in theology in her archdiocese.

We wish Sr. Duong all the best as she takes these next steps in her life journey, and she shares her wealth of knowledge with those that she will encounter in her journey.



*Sister Duong Pham of the Lovers of the Holy Cross of Hanoi.*



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# *Escuela Móvil: Taking Education on The Move in México*

By: Michael Hernandez, Mission Support and Communications Manager

There is an unfortunate reality plaguing our world. Children and teenagers across the globe are forced to live on the streets, either struggling to support their families or trying to escape abusive homes. Due to living on the streets, these young individuals face the constant dangers of drugs, human trafficking, and other harsh realities. As a result, an organization known as Mobile School was established to provide these children with a safe and playful learning environment to unlock their true potential. While the Mobile School organization initially started in Belgium, the organization has developed 36



*Sister Elizabeth Carrasco with one of her Escuela Móvil students.*

Silva found a sponsor for this ministry in Alvida QRO agreed to add the Escuela Móvil ministry to their program under the condition that the CDP Sisters take full responsibility for its operation. Upon accepting these terms, the Sisters started the Escuela Móvil ministry on April 12, 2013, in the city of Querétaro, where the regional motherhouse is located.

The Escuela Móvil ministry involves taking large carts equipped with chalkboards, games, and writing supplies to different locations in downtown Querétaro four times a week. Approximately 100 children, ranging from ages 5 to 15 years old, visit the mobile school throughout the week. In addition to the children who visit the school, young mothers sometimes visit the school to gain knowledge and receive advice. First-time visitors often become regulars as they gravitate to the program for warmth, attention, companionship, and lessons, which provide a respite from their challenging lives.

An example of the growth and success stories witnessed by the Escuela Móvil volunteers is a pair of siblings who regularly attend the school. They show up daily, regardless of time, weather, or the many adversities they may face and survive. Yet, despite the many challenges that life may deal these siblings, they never cease to smile at the blessing of each new day.

Among the siblings is the sister, who is intelligent, capable of many things, and possesses incredible motivation. She is motivated to overcome the temptation and the difficulties presented by living on the street. She advises others to stay clean and to remain on the right path. Her dream is to become a lawyer someday, and her challenge is not to fall prey to drugs. Her brother is intelligent, happy, and gifted at chess. He has developed defense mechanisms that make him appear a little rough on the outside. However, once you get to know him, there is no question he is tender on the inside.

For Sister Elizabeth Carrasco, Sister María Guadalupe "Lupita" Silva, and the volunteers, stories like these and many other sacred stories like it make their work with Escuela Móvil worthwhile.

mobile schools in 21 different countries spread throughout Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Europe.

After seeing the positive influence that the organization has brought worldwide, Jessika Martínez, a CDP Associate in Mexico, introduced the idea to them. Inspired by the concept and after observing the needs of their community, the CDP Sisters in Querétaro, México, proceeded to develop their own ministry to bring forth positive change within their community. They called it "Escuela Móvil."

Sisters Elizabeth Carrasco, and María Guadalupe "Lupita"



*Sisters Elizabeth Carrasco and María Guadalupe "Lupita" Silva with their students doing activities.*

## A Letter From the Desk of the Superior General

# Serving Communities Around The World



When our Sisters began the Congregation in 1866, the world was very different; it was compact. Sisters were recruited from France by Mother St. Andrew and brought to teach in the rural areas of Texas. However, times have changed, and our Congregation now lives in a global society. We now serve not only our local community but communities around the world. This edition of the Living Providence Newsletter covers just a few examples of how the Congregation works to serve our local and global community.

Part of the Congregation's work of serving communities worldwide is providing housing for numerous Sisters from Congregations around the world when they study at Our Lady of the Lake University or other universities in San Antonio. Sr. Duong was one such Sister who recently graduated from the Oblate School of Theology. She will return to her Congregation as the first woman to achieve a Ph.D. in Theology in her archdiocese, where she will share her gifts.

The CDPs in Mexico minister on the streets of Querétaro, México, through the Escuela Móvil initiative. This initiative allows the Sisters to educate impoverished children living on the streets and set them on the right path.

There was recently an influx of refugees from Afghanistan seeking refuge in San Antonio. In response, Congregations from around the United States came to assist them. Though we were unable to provide Sisters to aid in this endeavor, we supported the relief effort by hosting 20 Sisters from other Congregations. These Sisters stayed at the Convent at no cost to them as we provided them rooms, food, and hospitality.

Initially founded in 1939 by the Sisters of Divine Providence, the Madonna Center stands as a testament to the Congregations legacy of supporting the local community. The Center serves the community by assisting those in the poorest areas in San Antonio.

Sincerely in Divine Providence,

*Sister Pearl Ceasar, CDP*

Sister Pearl Ceasar, CDP  
Superior General

# Hosting The Sisters Who Answered The Call from Catholic Charities

By: Michael Hernandez, *Mission Support and Communications Manager* and Stephanie Esquivel *Former Mission Support Director*



*Former Mission Support Director Stephanie Esquivel interviewing Sisters Ann Pratt, and Anita Brenek.*

The Congregation of Divine Providence recently hosted Sisters who responded to a call for help from Catholic Charities of San Antonio. Catholic Charities sent out this request via the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). The LCWR sent out this request to the major superiors of every Congregation in the United States. Requesting they send any available Sisters to assist the Afghan refugees who fled their homes and are now settling within the United States. Of the 20 Sisters hosted by the CDP, those interviewed were: Ann Pratt of the Racine Dominicans of Wisconsin, Magreth Mkenda of the Maryknoll Sisters, Agnes Johnson of the Racine Dominicans of Wisconsin, Catherine Morgan of the Dominican Sisters of Sparkill, Jeannine DeClue of the Dominican Sisters of Sparkill, Dorothy Fabritze of the Missionary Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, and Sister Jo of the Little Sisters of Jesus.

During the interview, the Sisters recounted many eye-opening experiences while assisting the refugees. The Sisters assisted the refugees in various ways, from helping build chairs, sorting clothes, buying supplies, and even assisting with their documentation as they entered the country.

These refugees need such extensive assistance because many of them are coming

with nothing but the clothes on their backs. They are starting their lives over in a completely foreign country. In addition, they now have to learn an entirely new language, and they must now build an entirely new support system where they have no one else. Another aspect that proves a challenge in acclimating the refugees to the United States is finding the proper clothing. Our sizing is entirely different, and there is a cultural limitation on what they are allowed to wear.

Yet despite these setbacks, the Sisters noted that many of the refugees maintain a positive attitude and are eager to start their new lives in our country. In addition, the Sisters talked about how willing they are to share what little they have with each other and the Sisters as gratitude for their assistance.

At the conclusion of the interview, the Sisters left a few messages for those unaware of the reasons that have caused the refugees to flee to the United States and how they hope that we can be more accepting of the refugees into our country.

These refugees are fleeing their homes out of fear due to threats of violence and persecution from assisting the United States military when they were deployed to Afghanistan. The Sisters also left a message asking that people set aside any preconceived notions so that we may be more accepting of the refugees as they make the United States their new home.



*Former Mission Support Director Stephanie Esquivel interviewing Sisters Magreth Mkenda, Agnes Johnson, Catherine Morgan and Jeannine DeClue.*

# The Madonna Center: A Legacy Built on Helping Those in Need

By: Michael Hernandez, Mission Support and Communications Manager

The Madonna Center, formerly known as the Girls' Club of San Antonio, was founded in 1939 by the Sisters of Divine Providence. Initially, the purpose of the Girls' Club of San Antonio was to provide job training and personal and social development for girls ages 7-17 living on the Westside of the city. However, when co-educational groups became more common, the Center began assisting boys and girls of all ages. This change in who the Center helped eventually led to the name change from the Girls' Club of San Antonio to the Madonna Neighborhood Center.



*Sister Pearl Ceasar, Superior General, speaks of Madonna Center's history with the Congregation.*

The Madonna Center's Senior Services cater to those within a 3-mile radius of the Center and aged 60 and above. These individuals are provided with 1/3 of their daily nutritional allowance through the Centers lunch program. At the Center, Seniors can participate in various recreational events and take classes to help with their health and wellness. These activities aim to reduce feelings of isolation and empower the senior's wellness on their own; the Center also offers transportation to those transitioning from drivers to riders.

Also provided by the Madonna Center is the HIPPY program, which helps provide parents with books and activities that allow them to prepare their children for school. As part of the program, parents also receive 30 weeks' worth of school readiness curriculum designed to help them provide their children with the tools needed for continued academic success in school.

The Madonna Center's Community Hub program provides the Center's Community Health Workers a way of getting engaged with their at-risk community members with face-to-face visits. The program also allows the Center to assist these community members in finding the resources needed to improve their health and social outcomes.

The Madonna Center serves as a testament to the Congregation of Divine Providences' mission of serving the community, especially those most in need.

Currently, the Madonna Center is a 4-Star TRS Provider for the Texas Rising Star Program. This is the highest rating offered by the Texas Rising Star Program, a quality-based childcare rating system of Texas Early Childhood programs. The Center has built a strong team of childcare providers and teachers who provide the highest quality of care in the State of Texas. In addition, the Center also offers numerous programs that assist various members of the community, whether they are children, adults, or seniors. Examples of these programs that cater to these different groups are the Senior Services, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), and Community Hub programs to name a few.



*Sister Mary Bordelon speaks at the unveiling of the Madonna Center's Infant and Toddler Building.*

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