Patricia Parks is a Woman of Faith

Long before lay ministry was common, Pat and Jim Parks were living it. She was a young mom and teacher and he was a youthful dad and lawyer when the letters started coming. Her sister, Madre Miguel, a BVM nun, had gone to Ecuador to work at the Working Boys’ Center in Quito. She wrote to the couple about the children, the poverty and then about Raul. He was without any family at age five and working the streets to survive. Pat and Jim had a child the same age and could not imagine what life for Raul was like. Even though they did not have much to send, they began to regularly donate to the Center.

That was 1967. Today Pat has served as Volunteer Recruitment and Development Director for the Center for over three decades. The Parks’ have ten children, three of whom were adopted from Ecuador, and many grandchildren.

We commend Pat, her husband, Jim, and their multicultural family for extraordinary effort on behalf of the international ministry of the Church.

The extended Parks Family now includes their dear friend Father John Halligan, S.J., who founded the Center and today coordinates it with Sister Miguel.

Father started the Center in the attic of the Compania, a Jesuit church in Quito, with about 250 street children, or shoeshine boys, who worked to support their families.

Today the Center boasts a grade school, trade school, medical and dental clinics and a small shopping mall featuring furniture, bakery and a beauty salon. The Center’s trade school is the best in Ecuador and the students train at the Center’s businesses. Over 2,000 people receive three meals each day, except Sunday, when the Center is closed. As Center members learn and grow stronger, they gradually work their way out the cycle of grinding poverty. With steady saving accounts, they can provide decent housing for their families.

Pat will never forget her first trip to Quito. “Padre and I visited a little old woman, Maria, who had lived her entire life in a mud dugout in the ground. As she was dying, someone took her to a tin shack so she could die with dignity. As he anointed her, I was overwhelmed with the circumstances of her life. After you visit the Center, it is never hard to ask for money or find more to give of yourself,” she pointed out.

Today, Pat has a national computerized database. “This is a far cry from the years when Jim, the kids and I did all the stuffing, sorting and stamping. But we are just as involved as ever because the number of people that come to the Center keeps growing,” Pat said.

Pat leads mission trips to Quito for people of the Milwaukee area. Lay Salvatorian Tom Hunt nominated Pat for the Women of Faith Award after joining her in a group mission trip. Visitors reflect on third world poverty and how Christians can respond. “The trips are about a week and include a home visit to a family enrolled in the Center. Everyone is so moved during the visit as they experience the reality of the third world. But they also experience the Friendliness of the people and the hope that the Center offers,” Pat explained.

Pat and Jim are proud that their family continues its work for the Center. “Our kids love and live the mission. This was God’s plan so we could help make a difference.”

Women of Faith Award Presentation and Lecture

Thursday, October 14, 7 p.m.
SDS Community House
4311 North 100th Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Please use North Entrance.
Free, but reservations requested.
Call 414.466.7414 by October 11.