CSJ Profile: Living in Service to Others
an interview with Marcella Campos, CSJ

The CSJ Constitution states: “Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church lives to continue the mission of Christ . . . we participate in this transforming mission, proclaiming God’s new creation in word and sacrament, in the witness of our lives, and in service.” At 83 years old, Marcella Josephina Campos, CSJ, continues to live as she always has, in service to others.

As a child, Marcella and her family lived on a farm in a village called Puerto de Luna (port of the moon) three miles outside Santa Rosa, NM. Marcella was the oldest daughter, the fifth of nine children. Along with their mother, they took care of the farm while her father ran a sheep ranch. “I am a worker,” Marcella said. “I was always in the kitchen; I loved to help my mother.”

Her education began in a one-room school. Marcella then attended public school in Santa Rosa from second grade through high school. She was exposed to helping others at a young age. Marcella said, “In high school, the students were closely connected with the Catholic Worker Movement and Dorothy Day. We had a very progressive pastor in our parish – we did community work.”

After high school, Marcella and her friend Rose Agnes Urban applied to the Victory Noll Sisters in Indiana. “I always wanted to go to a place where I could serve people,” she said. But, wanting to get her education first, she attended the College of St. Joseph, Albuquerque, NM, with hopes of becoming a teacher. Marcella laughs as she said, “When in college, we wrote back and withdrew our applications from the Noll sisters, deciding we did not like their habits.” In August, during her second year of college, Marcella was in church when Sister Gaudentia, Sister Maristella, Sister Athanasius, and Sister Melissa came through the side door in their St. Joseph habits. “I just held my breath; it was love at first sight. On October 15, 1970, I asked to enter the Sisters of St. Joseph. The sisters told me they were celebrating the 300th anniversary of the CSJs arrival to the United States from LePuy, France. They were wondering how they were going to celebrate, and said, ‘Now we know – we have our first postulant.’” Marcella completed the college year and then Monsignor Philip Cassidy drove Marcella, Rose Agnes Urban, and Pita Sanchez to Boston. “We were so excited; the sisters lined up to greet us,” said Marcella.

Marcella’s first ministry was teaching second grade in Santa Rosa, NM. She was then assigned to teach seventh and eighth grade in Santa Fe. She later applied to Boston College to acquire a master’s degree in education. For two years, she

Sculpture “Angelitas de Caridad” was dedicated in an October 2011 ribbon-cutting ceremony. The dedication was part of the 40th anniversary celebration of the Citizens Information Committee of Martineztown, the community’s neighborhood association. Marcella’s image is among those included on the bottom portion of the sculpture.
taught fifth-grade at St. Columbkille School, Brighton, religious education after school, and attended night school. “After I graduated I went back to New Mexico. I considered this a test for me,” Marcella recalled. “With my master’s degree I was assigned to teach fourth-grade students.”

Marcella’s service to others, her true sense of mission, came in the midst of Vatican II. Marcella said, “I always considered helping the poor my first love.” Marcella, Tina and Pita Sanchez, and Mickie and Rose Agnes Urban decided to write a proposal to open a parish ministry in Albuquerque. The CSJ community approved their request, and St. Ignacio Parish ministry began. They needed to reach out to the people. To do this, they developed a parish census which opened doors the homes of the people. This was how they learned of the struggles of their neighbors. The story goes as follows:

It was the early 1970s. South Martineztown met the Federal standards for designation as a “blighted area,” making it eligible to receive federal monies for urban renewal. The monies were part of Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty. Urban Renewal projects proposed to move the residents out of the area and sell the land to the city of Albuquerque. The city neglected to involve the Martineztown community in the planning process. Residents were angered when they were told that they would be relocated. They organized to fight the proposed plan. The Citizens’ Information Committee (CIC), a locally controlled, grassroots organization was formed to educate and inform residents of their options. The efforts of the residents, CIC and others, led to redefinition of the project from relocation to rehabilitation of the neighborhood.¹

Marcella, and siblings Maria and Frank Martinez from Martineztown, were part of the initial group that established CIC. “We brought hope to the area,” said Marcella. As a result of widespread community support and commitment, the government provided 4.2 million dollars for new homes. Martineztown was able to transform itself, creating an eastern gateway to downtown Albuquerque that maintains the residential character of the historic community.

“Our mission was not done,” Marcella said. “Once Martineztown was completed, Maria, Sisters Joachim Boland, Gemella Casey, and I moved into the new apartments and managed the building. We drove patients to the doctor; collected food, and distributed it to them. We took care of the inebriated, called emergency services when someone needed them, and we helped the elderly.”

Marcella, Joachim, Gemella, and Mary Cunning, CSJA, started the New Mexico CSJ Associate group together. They invited people who might be interested. Practically everyone they contacted decided to join. Now approximately twenty-plus associates gather every other month for meetings and prayer.

Marcella continued, “I worked with the city and did home visitation. I was the voice for the people. I would pass on their problems to the appropriate people. I ministered at the jail for a few years and helped the inmates prepare for a GED.” During this time, Marcella also directed the religious education program at St. Anne’s Parish and then San Martine, where she trained teachers and worked with parents.

“They retired now, I still minister. On Wednesdays, a friend and I go to the St. Vincent de Paul store and do whatever is needed. We cut up old towels, put together grab bags, and make artificial flowers to sell. On Tuesdays, we make communion calls in homes for Holy Family Parish. I now live in senior citizen housing. Here, people come to me and I listen. I also visit people who are in the hospital,” states Marcella. “The Lord is keeping me here because I guess He has more work for me.” †

¹ http://beta.worldcat.org/archivegrid/collection/data/58675004

Sisters and associates gathered to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of St. Rose School in Santa Rosa. Back row L-R: Pita Sanchez, CSJA, Florence Kahler, CSJ, Mary Lou McCarthy, CSJ, Helen Halligan, CSJ, and Josephine Cushing, CSJA. Front row L-R: Helen Noonan, CSJ, Rose Urban, Marcella Campos, CSJ, and Helen Thomas Colbert, CSJ.