

Sister Peg honored for heading Sojourner Truth House mission

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"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." John 10:10

GARY - The staff and clients of Sojourner Truth House have known for 21 years that Sister Peg Spindler, CSA, executive director, makes a difference in her community. Last month, the Teachers' Insurance and Annuity Association made it official.

Sister Peg, of the Congregation of St. Agnes, was named a "Difference Maker 100" honoree by the TIAA, one of 100 individuals working in the nonprofit sector throughout the U.S. who have made significant contributions in their communities.

The Difference Maker 100 program was launched in early 2018 as part of TIAA's 100th anniversary to "recognize the positive impact nonprofit employees have on their world," according to the association. The company will recognize each honoree by making a \$10,000 donation in their name to a nonprofit organization that they support, and it's no surprise that Sister Peg's choice is Sojourner Truth House, which she helped found 21 years ago.

TIAA received more than 4,000 nominations. The top 100 were selected by a panel of judges based on their impact, creativity, perseverance and motive.

While Sister Peg, the only Indiana honoree, has little regard for personal recognition, she agreed to fill out the TIAA application after learning the award carried a cash prize. "I don't know who nominated me, and I didn't think I'd win it - a national award - but with a chance to receive \$10,000, I filled out the form," she admitted.

On her entry form, Sister Peg was asked to explain how she makes a difference, responding with an explanation of the work done at STH: "We work with homeless and at-risk women and their children to get them into stable housing in a sustainable, healthy way. We also have a pantry and women's (clothing) closet. We serve about 2,000 people a month. Last week, a former client from 2006 came in. She has a great job and was looking to give back through her work. Not only do we make a difference in the lives of homeless (women), but they make a difference in the lives of our staff and volunteers. The mutual engagement helps us all grow as a human community. Our model, Sojourner Truth, would be proud!"

Since 1997, she has helped thousands of at-risk women and their children who struggle with homelessness and poverty. Clients of Sojourner Truth House, a ministry of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, come from four local homeless shelters to receive counseling and support services, job and basic skills training, health care screenings and referrals,

food, clothing, and help finding housing. In 2017, Sister Peg, her staff and volunteers served an average of 2,162 clients per month, provided 11,462 meals, distributed 175,000 pounds of food, and clothed 2,286 people.

Despite her busy schedule and all of the resources already provided at STH, Sister Peg is always adding new services, including a schoolroom, medical clinic and furniture cupboard for women moving into their own homes. In 2018, STH planted its first kitchen garden, providing food for its own meals and sharing the bounty with clients and the local community. "We had a lot of beans, snow peas, eggplant, tomatoes, squash, Swiss chard and all kinds of lettuce, and rhubarb. We put in a sprinkler system, because it took 2-1/2 hours to water, and next year we hope to have classes for clients to teach them how to grow a garden, using ours to demonstrate," Sister Peg noted.

STH has also expanded its fundraising through monthly Coffee & Conversation events and numerous Women's Aid gatherings, with female supporters hosting food and fellowship events for their friends and talking about STH and its work. "The goal was to raise \$50,000 with 50 events, and we are at 71 percent of our goal after having 20+ events this year," Sister Peg reported.

Once the \$10,000 prize arrives, Sister Peg and her staff will determine whether it is needed for operating expenses or can be combined with a grant that has been applied for to expand the pole barn that stores furniture, dishes and other donations as well as gardening tools.

"Every time I see a client clutch keys to her new apartment, every time I get a hug from a tiny excited child, I am re-energized to keep on," Sister Peg said.