

IHMs In Action



IHM Sisters Gloria Rivera and Paula (Paul Edward) Cathcart say their ministry “flows from the IHM commitment to both sustainability and to the City of Detroit.”

The two initiated Great Lakes Bioneers Detroit (GLBD) in 2005. Sister Gloria serves as its coordinator, and Sister Paula helps organize local workshops for the annual conference. GLBD is part of a network of Bioneers groups throughout the country.

The national Bioneers organization, created in 1990, promotes practical solutions to environmental and social problems, recognizing the interdependence and intelligence of the natural world. Bioneers holds an annual conference each October in California, and plenary sessions are broadcast through satellite feeds to “Beaming Bioneers” sites throughout the United States and Canada.

Sisters Paula and Gloria participated in the “beamed” conference in Traverse City, Mich., in 2004 and saw the potential for bringing the conference to Detroit. They met with representatives from 11 organizations to shape the purpose and get the project moving. Within four months Sister Gloria had submitted an application to establish the GLBD satellite, and the first Great Lakes Bioneers Detroit Conference was held in October 2005.

“We not only tap into information at a national level, but the conference also highlights the power and richness of Detroit’s diversity and explores topics relevant to current urban issues through the expertise of our local presenters,” Sister Gloria explains.

“The IHMs have always been committed to social justice and advocacy for the abandoned and the poor,” she continues. “We know the Earth has been abandoned in many ways, and we see the results of environmental injustice. We work in collaboration with organizations in the Detroit area to effect change toward green thinking and just living.”

Sister Gloria says that GLBD has developed about 30 community partnerships from the annual conferences.

“We’ve worked with others to try to close the Detroit incinerator, and we’ve helped create the Detroit Food Policy Council’s first board. The board will develop and maintain a sustainable, localized, healthy food system for city residents.

“Under the direction of a professor from Eastern Michigan University and in collaboration with 10 local community partners we are also working with a place-based eco-justice education project in eight schools.

“Through healthy collaborations and systemic approaches, we are trying to live out a truth we have come to realize: the environmental movement and the social justice movement are not just intertwined – they are one.”

The 2009 Great Lakes Bioneers Detroit Conference will be held at Marygrove College Oct. 16 -18. For more information, go to www.glbd.org or e-mail info@glbd.org.