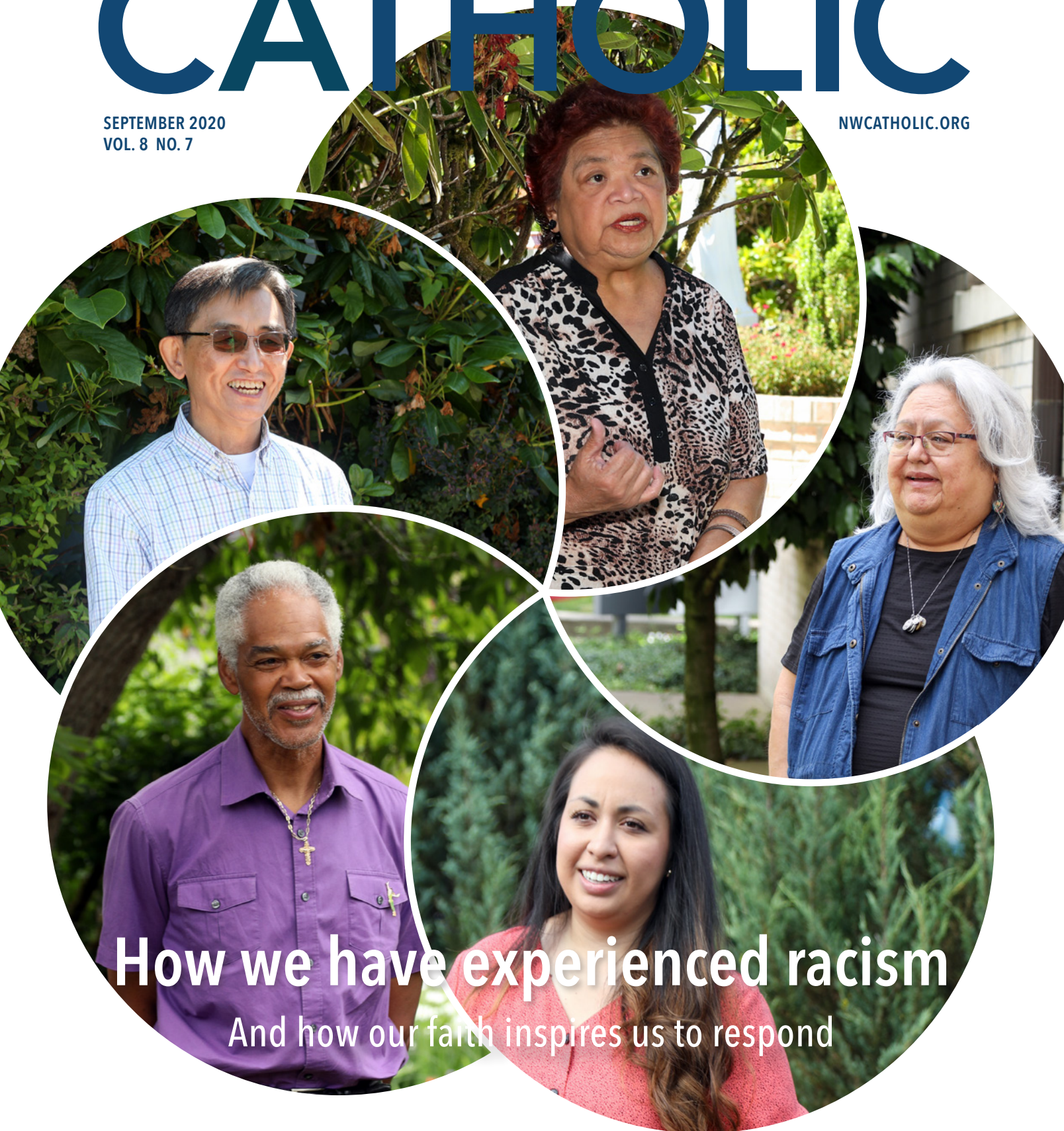


# NORTHWEST CATHOLIC

SEPTEMBER 2020  
VOL. 8 NO. 7

NWCATHOLIC.ORG



**How we have experienced racism**  
And how our faith inspires us to respond



# ‘TO LOVE is to give yourself away’

Q-AND-A WITH MIRYA MUÑOZ-ROACH



Miryá Muñoz-Roach is the first woman executive director in the 100-year history of St. Vincent de Paul of Seattle-King County, which helps meet the urgent needs of our neighbors, including assistance with rent, utilities and food. She attended Catholic schools growing up in Puerto Rico and has served in lay pastoral ministry in Michigan and as a lay ecclesial minister in the Archdiocese of Seattle. The mother of three, who joined St. Vincent de Paul as a volunteer in 2010 and became a staff member in 2012, is now leading the organization into its second century of service to the poor.

**What was your experience of growing up as a Catholic in Puerto Rico? Are there any prayers or devotions from your childhood that continue to be important to you?**

Growing up Catholic in Puerto Rico meant more than attending Mass. Everything we did had a spiritual aspect to it. Being Puerto Rican and Catholic is central to who I am — it is my identity. The Puerto Rican culture and spirituality are grounded in community, family traditions, songs, music and Caribbean rhythms which have found their way into our liturgies.

“Amar Es Entregarse” (“To love is to give yourself away”) is a song you might hear during Spanish Mass here in Seattle or back in Puerto Rico. These words describe the kind of faith and spirituality handed down to me by

Stephen Brashar

my parents and faith community, along with the truth that as a people, we journey together.

Every Year on November 19, Puerto Ricans celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Divine Providence (La Virgen de la Divina Providencia), patroness of Puerto Rico. I remember special liturgical celebrations with tambourines, güiros and maracas, when we would serenade Our Lady of Divine Providence. Living on a small island where hurricanes can be devastating, trusting in Our Lady is in our DNA.

**You helped start Centro Rendu, a Latino services program of St. Vincent de Paul, in 2013. What are some highlights of the program? Why is it an important connection for the Latino community?**

Latinos make up 34% of the population in some areas of our county. Centro Rendu was born to address the needs for culturally responsive and targeted resources and programming, and to create access and opportunities for Latinos to be on the giving, and not just receiving, end of charity.

In 2013, St. Vincent de Paul engaged in a listening process with the South King County Latino community. They told us they had a hard time trusting government agencies, but would come to SVdP for resources — to seek help, support, education and legal counsel.

These quickly became key offerings of Centro Rendu, which is run by an all-Latino staff. Centro Rendu is named after blessed Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity who mentored the founders of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Paris in the mid-1800s.

“From Guests to Hosts” [the Archdiocese of Seattle’s 2007 Hispanic ministry pastoral plan] means to empower, to give opportunity, to create space for Latinos to have a voice and be able to lead. This was and remains central

to the mission of Centro Rendu, which also exists to protect and defend vulnerable families.

**Who has most inspired your faith and work, and why?**

My parents, Gladys and Agustin Munoz, whose love of 70 years was grounded in faith, family and service to the community. Together, they created spaces where people would feel welcome and valued, bringing forward the best in people. They were generous with others, giving of themselves as well as things they owned.

Mom’s favorite Scripture passage (which she reminded you of constantly) was 1 Corinthians 13, and her epitaph reads, “Love never ends.” My dad was a well-read man; one of his most-defining reads was *Don Quixote*, where the gentle yet determined Don Quixote serves as an agent of grace, seeing in people the goodness they cannot yet see in themselves. As an accomplished cardiologist, my dad knew the heart needed joy and laughter to stay healthy, as the priest said at his funeral Mass.

Their lives’ motto was “Que el que nos trate sienta el deseo de conocerte” — “May those who walk with us feel a desire to get to know you, O Lord.”

**How is St. Vincent de Paul responding to the community’s major needs today? What might the organization’s next century of service look like?**

As Vincentians, our spirit is one of encuentro (encounter, as on the road to Emmaus). In the spirituality of St. Vincent, the person in need, the one experiencing poverty, exclusion, marginalization — that is Christ himself.

As a ministry and nonprofit Catholic lay organization entering our second century, we are going deeper into the community to listen and respond with concrete actions that center upon the

needs of our neighbors, that we may respond with justice.

Justice offers a hand up, a place at the table where decisions are made. It requires a deeper investment in the lives of those who have been historically marginalized. It requires a daily examination of conscience to

**“In the spirituality of St. Vincent, the person in need, the one experiencing poverty, exclusion, marginalization — that is Christ himself.”**

help us reflect and uncover our sins of exclusion, apathy and discrimination.

Having been given the opportunity to lead SVdP at such a time as this, I feel humbled as well as responsible to help create, support and hold spaces for meaningful conversations around race, culture, faith and spirituality. As a Hispanic/Latina woman and mother, I know I am called to lead SVdP with all of who I am.

**What are three ways Catholics can respond to the cry of the poor through St. Vincent de Paul?**

Volunteer, donate, get involved!

Enrich your lives spiritually and live out the Gospel mandate as a member of a local parish conference. Be transformed as you walk with people in their time of great need, accompanying them in their moments of struggle.

Bring new ideas to SVdP, where you have the opportunity to form a community of faith that responds as the body of Christ to the needs of the poor and marginalized, who are the face of Jesus. Ω