



Dr. Zilda Arns Neumann to receive 2006 Opus Prize at University of Notre Dame

NOTRE DAME, IND. (Oct. 5, 2006) - Dr. Zilda Arns Neumann, a pediatrician who founded and leads Pastoral da Criança (the Pastoral of the Child), an innovative public health program that works with more than 265,000 volunteers to help poor families in her native Brazil, will receive the third annual Opus Prize in a Nov. 8 ceremony hosted by the University of Notre Dame.

The \$1 million Opus Prize is given annually to honor a person who "combines a driving entrepreneurial spirit with an abiding faith to combat poverty, illiteracy, hunger, disease and injustice." The award is annually presented by a Catholic college or university in partnership with the Opus Prize Foundation to provide students with inspiring exemplars of humanitarian work rooted in religious faith.

Neumann began to organize the Pastoral of the Child in 1983 at the urging of her brother, Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns, then archbishop of Sao Paulo, Brazil. Although an ecumenical project, it takes advantage of the Brazilian Catholic Church's ecclesial infrastructure, uniquely combining local community organizing and large-scale public health initiatives to promote the health of children and to reduce infant mortality.

"Children are the seed for peace or violence in the future, depending on how they are cared for and stimulated," she says of her work. "Thus, their family and community environment must be sown to grow a fairer and more fraternal world, a world to serve life and hope."

Nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize last year, Neumann has received numerous other honors for her work, including special awards from UNICEF, the Pan American Health Organization Prize, Brazil's National Order of Educative Merit, the University of São Paulo's Human Rights Prize, Lions Club International's Humanitarian of the Year Prize, Rotary International's Jean Harris Prize, B'nai B'rith's Human Rights Medal, the National Council of Brazilian Women's Tribute of Respect, the Simon Bolivar Medal and the United Nations Association's Human Rights Prize.

Enlisting some 265,000 volunteers, most of them poor women working in their own communities, the Pastoral of the Child annually serves more than 100,000 pregnant women and nearly 2 million children in every state in Brazil. In the impoverished communities it serves, the infant mortality rate has been reduced to 15 deaths per thousand, roughly half the national average.

The Pastoral's numerous and varied activities include education, counseling and support of pregnant women; breast-feeding incentives; nutritional guidance and monthly weight monitoring of small children; instruction on the preparation and consumption of inexpensive, but highly nutritional products and often discarded leaves, peels and seeds; the control of preventable illnesses such as diarrhea and respiratory diseases through the use of homemade serums and the organization of community pharmacies; vaccination programs; natural family planning instruction and counseling; educational programs for the prevention of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases; literacy and recreational programs for children and parents; and catechetical programs to encourage nonviolence in families and communities.

Other exemplars of entrepreneurial community service receiving honors from the Opus Prize Foundation during the Notre Dame ceremony will be the Office for Farmworker Ministry (OFFM) in Apopka, Fla., and the Cristo Rey Network. Since 1971, the OFFM has established several nonprofit organizations - including health care clinics and a credit union - to support some 6,000 farmworker families in the rural Apopka area. The Cristo Rey Network, founded in 2001, is a national association of Catholic high schools providing college preparatory education to economically disadvantaged young people through work study and other programs.