

Needlework in Paraguay

Reflections by S. Charlaine Fill, SSND

In October 2001, I started a women's sewing workshop in one of our seventy-five parish communities in Pedro Juan Caballero, Paraguay. The idea came to me at a catechists' meeting in our diocese, when the coordinator asked us to name needs not yet met in our parishes. I have been concerned for some time by the lack of work available to our people, especially to the women. Usually they would be very busy in their homes during the morning hours, but had finished their cooking, cleaning, laundry and so on by noon time, and had little to occupy them in the hotter afternoon hours.

In the San Blas community about ten women joined our weekly group, using mostly scrap materials sent in shipment of supplies.

Those who had more skills helped teach others. Soon they had learned organizational and small business skills and were able to earn money for themselves and for the community. When a neighboring community asked to start a workshop, two San Blas women accompanied them, training them and helping to organize, as I had done in San Blas.

In the next three years, forty of the communities – some in the town and some in the “campo” areas which also belong to San Gerardo parish – have been organized and trained. At their own initiative, they have become legally incorporated, earned funds for the association, built a headquarters and training center, and are in the process of forming a co-op.

Their work consists principally in making clothing and blankets, but they have also organized courses to learn embroidery, making of lingerie, and even the making of nanduti (Paraguayan lace) and ao poi (hand-woven and embroidered typical clothing).

At present there are over four hundred women and twelve men in the Asociacin de Talleres de Costura. (Association of Sewing Workshops)

(This conversation took place spontaneously as S. Charlaine shared her experiences as a missionary with the author in 2005.)