

Dorothy Gallagher

Social Worker
1894-1982

by Barbara Magerl

Many refugees from the 1910 Mexican revolution settled among other Mexican-born people on Kansas City's West Side. In 1919 Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church opened to serve the city's "Mexican colony."

While delivering Christmas donations to the West Side, Dorothy Gallagher, a teacher at the exclusive Notre Dame de Sion School, found a new calling. The daughter of a wealthy businessman, she began her social work career by joining the Agnes Ward Amberg Club, a Catholic women's group operating a clinic on the West Side. She enrolled at the New York School of Social Work to hone her skills.

As the minority community expanded, Gallagher's family donated land for Guadalupe School and later, land for a Spanish style settlement house at 23rd and Jarboe. Miss Gallagher drew the first plans, hired an architect, and paid for the building, which opened in 1936.

Residing at the Center and receiving no salary, Miss Gallagher became the "Godmother of Guadalupe." Under her direction, Guadalupe Center became nationally recognized. The social and educational center for the West Side offered clubs, classes, vocational help, sports teams, and held annual fiestas. It obtained interpreters so Mexicans could be admitted to General Hospital. Miss Gallagher even served briefly as a Scout 'Master' so that a Boy Scout troop could begin.

In 1944 Gallagher gave up her position to help in post-war France, and the Kansas City Catholic Diocese took over the Center. When she returned home, she taught at the University of Kansas and the College of St. Teresa (now Avila College), helped start the local Catholic Charities, and chaired the Jackson County Welfare Association from 1953 to 1955. She died in 1982 at age 88, having played a key role in helping new American citizens.



Sources

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