

IPS Alumna

Sr. Florence Muia

will receive the Damen Award on behalf of the Institute of Pastoral Studies and the Graduate School at Loyola's 2007 Founders' Dinner Saturday, June 2, 2007.

Named for Loyola University Chicago's primary founder, Arnold Damen, S.J., this award is granted to the alumnus or alumna from each of Loyola's schools and colleges. It recognizes accomplishments in industry, leadership in community, and service to others.

Sr. Florence graduated in 2001 with a Master of Arts in pastoral counseling degree. In 2002 Sr. Florence founded Upendo Village which is addressing the effects of AIDS/HIV on women and children in Naivasha, Kenya. Kenya is the home of one million AIDS orphans, who are stigmatized, alienated, shunned and neglected in their own country. More than 1.5 million people in Kenya have died from AIDS, and 2.2 million live with HIV infection. Millions of women and children suffer daily from the effects of AIDS and HIV. Upendo Village surrounds people with resources and support to improve their health, increase their lifespan and plan for the future. Housing, health programs, counseling, education, home-based care, support groups and self-help projects strengthen women and children, as well as the local community to respond with hope and love. Upendo is the Kiswahili word for "love".

In 2005 she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

For this licensed pastoral counselor helping those in desperate need corresponds with the peace and justice principles of the Catholic Church. Her staff of 5 along with 20 volunteers pray regularly for people infected with the disease as well as their families, calling for the strength to carry on the vital work in the area. They travel into surrounding communities and offer treatment and counseling services at the homes of those infected with AIDS, and try to prepare them for a peaceful death. The staff and volunteers also provide transportation services to obtain necessary medical treatment. At the same time, the representatives strive to meet the spiritual needs of the people, spearheading religious rituals and celebrations.

At the Upendo Village headquarters, the staff and volunteers operate a small medical clinic for physical examinations. An onsite transitional shelter for patients and families is located in the heart of the property. The staff tries to boost their immune systems helping to bolster their weakened bodies. Hot nutritious meals often help victims of the virus regain their strength. Compassion and sensitivity is part of the treatment at the compound, where staff members believe it is critical to let ailing individuals and their families know that somebody cares about them.

Since Upendo Village began operation in 2003, over 5,000 people have been served. Staff and volunteers provide AIDS awareness education and help refer clients to trained medical professionals, social workers and counselors. They also assist with the overwhelming needs of family members of those stricken with the lethal virus. The disastrous immune disorder has resulted in making orphans out of nearly 1.5 million

children. Funds are also dispersed to those infected with the virus for housing costs and basic needs. Placing abandoned and orphaned children in foster homes and orphanages is a key responsibility that Upendo Village staff members shoulder on behalf of the affected population.

For further information on attending the event, please contact the IPS office after May 1.