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SEWING FOR OTHERS Agueda Zavaleta, is a volunteer teacher for a women's sewing group at St. Peter and St. Denis parish in Yonkers. She stitches one of the hundreds of protective masks group members have made to help needy Westchester families during the coronavirus pandemic. The project is overseen by Catholic Charities Community Services of Westchester.

In Yonkers, Immigrant Women Sewing Masks for Needy Families

By **ARMANDO MACHADO** -

CATHOLIC NEW YORK

At St. Peter and Denis parish in Yonkers, a group of women have been sewing protective masks in their homes for needy families as a way to help protect them from the coronavirus pandemic gesture that has been met with gratitude from families receiving the masks and meals at the parish food pantry.

The venture began three weeks ago.

"The women are using their skills and creativity to help in this crisis.

Ms. Hernandez is the day laborer organizer for CCCS Westchester. The 12 women who sew, most of them Hispanic immigrants, are members of a years-long sewing class conducted in the church basement before the crisis safety restrictions began.

The class is headed by Agueda Zavaleta, a volunteer sewing teacher; she and most of the women in the group are wives of day laborers.

Each woman uses her own sewing machine at home, with donated cloth and thread to carry out their good deed via Catholic Charities, which distributes the protective masks to people who are most in need in the Yonkers area.

Catholic Charities organizers said three members of the group were among parish women who made altar cloths used by Pope Francis during Masses he celebrated during his visit to the archdiocese in September

2015.

This is about helping to save lives and they pray for the sick, that they recuperate quickly.

Ms. Marroquin, a married mother of three, noted that in 2015, "we made five tablecloths for the pope; there were about 12 of us."

She said she learned a lot about sewing back then, later left the group and eventually returned to improve her skills even more.

Her husband, Umberto Lopez, is a day laborer.

Esmeralda Hoscoy, regional director of CCCS Westchester, said that of the several hundred masks that have been made, some have been given to frontline CC volunteer staffers doing community work and working the food pantries at the parish and the nearby CCCS Westchester office and many masks have been distributed to families who go to the food pantries, by request.

There are also masks that have been sold as a way to raise funds to pay some of the women in the sewing group who are out of work because of the coronavirus crisis.

The sales have been mostly to persons interested in supporting the Catholic Charities mission, in lieu of buying masks at a for-profit business. CCCS Westchester plans to sell some masks to businesses, and to nonprofit organizations.

"These masks are helping to protect and possibly even save lives," Ms. Hoscoy said. "On Wednesday alone when we distributed food (at the CCCS office), each volunteer was exposed to 300 persons between the two-hour timeframe."

The parish church is on Ludlow Street; its food pantry is typically open on Tuesdays. The CCCS office is about three blocks away on Hawthorne Avenue; its pantry oper-

ates sporadically, mostly on Wednesdays in recent weeks.

"They (the sewing group women) are doing it to help protect others," Ms. Hoscoy said. "It also keeps them busy. These are women who, like everyone else, are stuck at home. This gives them a goal. This gives them a challenge, and they're proud of their work."

Information or to donate material: (888) 744-7900.