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CONSECRATED LIFE - When Sr. Ana Gabriela Castro arrived in the United States from Morelia, Mexico, in 1988 as a Guadalupean Missionary Sister of the Holy Spirit, she felt isolated — not from her own community, but from the rest of religious life throughout the country.

Because she was no longer in Latin America, she felt disconnected from religious life in her home country. And in the United States, religious conferences, such as the Leadership Conference for Women Religious or the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, are reserved for those in leadership.

"I thought about how there are a lot of Hispanic sisters in the U.S. in the same situation as me," Castro said. "I started going to the LCWR assembly in 2006, when I was the provincial for my community, and I was very, very overwhelmed. It was an overwhelming experience for me as a Latina, as a Hispanic sister."

She said she didn't see another Hispanic sister in attendance and struggled with her English.

"But I decided to stay there, because I knew we needed to make a connection and be a part of this," she said.

Then, she met Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Sr. Joan McGlinchey, the vicar for religious in the Chicago archdiocese, and eventually, the two began to organize *encuentros* — gatherings —

for sisters who came from Latin America without a major superior in the United States.

The Association of Hispanic Sisters in the United States (Asociación de Religiosas Hispanas en los Estados Unidos, or), once an informal, grassroots network, has since received a grant from the [GHR Foundation](#) to become a bona fide organization.

With that, they're ready to change the realities of Hispanic sisters in the United States.

Creating a connection and a stronger identity

The encuentros began in 2008 and were a response to a need that "has become more and more acute," said Arturo Chavez, president of the Mexican American Catholic College (MACC) in San Antonio. That need is "between international sisters from Latin America ministering in the U.S. — usually just a few from a community — and the disconnection they feel from the wider church."

MACC, which also facilitates the [U.S.-Latin American Sisters Exchange Program](#) through Catholic Extension, is partnering with ARHEU to administer the GHR Foundation grant and provide the sisters resources and space as the organization strengthens and develops enough to eventually run on its own.

When a sister arrives to the United States at the request of a bishop, religious community, or priest, usually to work with a booming Latino population, "what often ends up happening is that there's very little support, and certainly fewer resources for ongoing formation and education," Chavez said.

The first encuentro, held in Chicago, was originally intended to be a support system, and 52 sisters from about 30 different communities attended.

"It was like water to parch thirst," Chavez said.

[Read more](#)

Source: globalsistersreport.org