

FIGUEROA DE PAGÁN, BELÉN (1918–1960)

A native of San Juan, Puerto Rico, the religious activist, Belén Figueroa de Pagán, became surrogate mother to her two younger sisters at the age of twelve. Well instructed in homemaking, Figueroa married Antonio Pagán in the 1940s and they joined the large wave of migrants leaving the island for the U.S. By the 1950s she was a student in the Arca Evangélica Bible Institute in Spanish Harlem and engaged in pastoral missionary work in the Latino community. The family moved to Niagara Falls where they began the first storefront church for Hispanics. At a time when a handful of Latino families lived in western New York, the Pagán-Figueroa family founded a second storefront mission, Los Vencedores en Cristo. By 1957 the family moved to Buffalo, New York and established another mission in the basement of their first owned wooden house. Named by her congregation, the “facilitator of dreams,” Figueroa died in 1960. The Belén Figueroa Foundation was incorporated to honor her accomplishments in Puerto Rico in 1986.