The Illinois chapter of the American Association of University Women (AAUW-IL, Inc.) established the Agent of Change Award in 1984 to be presented annually to a member who serves “as a catalyst to bring about positive societal change.” Five district directors select the annual awardee from nominations submitted from all branches, focusing on members who “have actively promoted change in the areas of education, equity, and /or public policy.”

The late Patty Crowley (1932-2005) was the first woman from AAUW Chicago Branch, Inc to receive this honor. She was selected in 1989 for her social activism on behalf of women and families.

Though she served Chicago as a lay (unordained) Christian for most of her life, AAUW-IL honored her for co-founding the Christian Family Movement as well as Deborah’s Place (a shelter for homeless women).

Crowley and the members of her women’s group helped found the Christian Family Movement in 1949. She and her husband Patrick combined their men’s and women’s Christian groups to put what they read in Scripture into social action for the greater good. They were inspired by Pope Pius XI’s call to Catholic Action, which encouraged lay Catholics to play a more active role in the church’s hierarchy.

Within three years, CFM had 5,000 nationwide members. By 1964, that number had grown to 100,000 according to William Droel’s essay *Patty Crowley: Lay Pioneer.*

The CFM lives on as a national network of small discipleship groups in parishes and neighborhoods. “Discipleship is accomplished through teaching one to use the methodology of ‘observe, judge, act’ in their daily lives - observing the situations around us, judging them in the light of Christ’s teaching and acting to make a difference,” according to current CFM programming. These groups meet regularly to discuss their communities, “judge what they have seen in the light of Jesus’ teaching, and act to change things for the better.”

Crowley refused to take singular credit for the organization’s inception. “These things evolve out of relationships and the way life develops,” she said.  
 Women’s shelter Deborah’s Place has been providing compassionate care to Chicago’s homeless women since 1985. Crowley and 15 other women teamed with the Eighth Day Center and Community Emergency Shelter Organization to provide a permanent overnight place for only women. “After more than 30 years, Deborah’s Place has helped over 4,000 women move from homeless to housed, from surviving to living,” according to the shelter’s website. Deborah’s Place focuses on reducing harm, improving quality of life and educating participants about mental health and recovery.

"If she felt there was an injustice or something wrong somewhere, she would try to fix it," her longtime friend and CFM member Jane Clark told the Chicago Tribune after Crowley’s death in 2005. "She was fiery. She could always get things done. She changed many lives.”  
 The Tribune also reported that Crowley slept on a mat on the floor of the shelter twice a month to better understand the plight of homeless women. One of the organization’s sites, The Patty Crowley Apartments, hosts 79 women who were formerly homeless.  
 In addition to founding the two organizations for which she was honored as an Agent of Change by the AAUW, Crowley was a mother of five, a foster mother of 14, a Eucharistic minister, board member of the Chicago Housing Authority and member of the League of Women Voters. She and her husband were married for 37 years after meeting at a Good Friday service at Chicago’s Holy Name Cathedral. The couple was invited by Pope Paul VI to take part in the Papal Birth Control Commission in 1964, in which they advised the papacy to reexamine its strict stance against contraception.  
 “Patty Crowley was an embodiment of Vatican II’s call for universal holiness,” Droel wrote. “Her everyday sanctity was a rejection of the modern temptation to live in isolation.”  
 Both CFM and Deborah’s Place still provide opportunities for lay Christians to serve, embodying the book of Matthew verse printed on the holy card at Crowley’s funeral: “Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned and comfort the stranger.”

As of 2018, the late Patty Crowley is one of only two women from AAUW Chicago Branch, Inc to receive the honor. (The other recipient is Jan Lisa Huttner, the awardee in 2012.)

LINKS

<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/chicagotribune/obituary.aspx?page=lifestory&pid=15759870>

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2005-11-27-0511270413-story.html>

William Droel’s essay *Patty Crowley: Lay Pioneer*