

**Sister Alicia** Valladolid-Cuarón was born in California. Her parents had immigrated to the United States from Mexico during the time of the Cristero movement. She was raised with her four siblings in El Paso, Texas. Alicia graduated college with a Bachelor of Art in Education in 1961 and began teaching remedial reading and English as a second language in a first-grade special education program, as well as in a Head Start program and adult education classes. She earned her Master of Art in Education as well as a certificate in Language and Learning Disabilities before moving to Colorado in the early 1970's.

By 1975, she earned her Doctorate in Education. While studying, she was a coordinator of Denver Head Start, where she developed and implemented the first bilingual program in Colorado. She then developed a bilingual and multicultural Child Development Associate Head Start program at Metropolitan State College where she was an Assistant Professor from 1974 to 1980.

In the 1970s and 1980s she conducted leadership training seminars for Latinas throughout the United States as founding director of EXITO (Institute for Hispanic Professional Development), a program she designed to assist women in professional and personal development. In 1980, she co-founded the national Adelante Mujer Hispanic Employment and Training Conference, which attracted 1,000 multigenerational women to discussions on education and career training. Cuarón was also popular keynote speaker for conferences run by corporations, charities, community colleges and universities.

In 1980, Sister Alicia was named Executive Director of the Colorado Economic Development Agency in Denver, becoming the first Latina to fill that role. She was the first woman appointed Executive Director of the National Hispanic Association of Construction Enterprises. Sister Alicia is an executive board member of the Colorado's Women's Forum. She has served as Chair of the Colorado Council on Working Women and National Director of Leadership, Education, and Educational Development for the League of United Latin American Citizens. She is a co-founder of the Circle of Latina Leadership.

In 1992, Cuarón left her business career to join The Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity in Denver to concentrate fully on her spiritual and personal mission to help those in need. From 1995 to 1997, Sister Alicia was posted at St. Patrick's Center as a Community Organizer where she continued her efforts to promote education and leadership development to the many immigrants and residents within the community. In 1995, she founded and directed the Familia Franciscan AIDS Ministry until 1997.

In 1998, Sister Alicia took her final vows at St. Joseph's Redemptorist parish where she had established the Centro Bienestar San Jose in 1997 to provide adult education, career training, and support services for new immigrant families. In 2004, she moved the now

Bienestar Family Center to Centro San Juan Diego, the Hispanic ministry of the Archdiocese of Denver. Sister Alicia served as Director of Bienestar from 1997 to 2014. In 2018, **Centro San Juan Diego** established the Sister Alicia Education Fund in her honor to raise funds for continuing education programs for immigrants. Today, the Center serves more than 5,000 families per year, offering citizenship, GED, computer and English classes, leadership programs, and supportive social services. To date, the Center has served over 50,000 families.



In 2003, Sister Alicia co-founded the **Latina SafeHouse** to support domestic violence victims for Spanish speaking immigrant women in Denver with counseling, self-sufficiency, advocacy, and legal services. As of 2017, she became a board member.

Sister Alicia has received accolades from numerous groups, including Big Sisters of Colorado and the Chicana Service Center. In 2000, she received the Maclovio Barraza Award for Leadership from the National Council of La Raza. Sister Alicia was honored as "Woman of the Year" by the Colorado Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and named one of the "100 Most Influential Hispanics in America" by *Hispanic Business* magazine. Sister Alicia was inducted into the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame in 2008 and the Colorado Latino Hall of Fame in 2019.

Sister Alicia has served the Sisters as Local Minister at Marycrest from 1999 to 2006. She also was a member of the Sister's Provincial Council from 2003 to 2007 and again starting in 2020 through April of 2021.

Her faith journey is unique. She was married and has a daughter. Of her journey, Alicia said, "I had accomplished a lot professionally more than I ever thought possible, but I felt a need to re-examine the direction my life was taking. The idea of entering a religious community had never entered my mind but when God called, I answered, 'Here I am Lord, you have called me' and I made the decision at the age of fifty-three to enter The Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity."