

The Metropolitan Organization celebrates 30th anniversary, honors three community heroes

HOUSTON — On Oct. 25, The Metropolitan Organization (TMO) of Houston celebrated 30 years of transforming the Houston area with a celebration at St. Theresa Catholic Church-Memorial Park.

"The Metropolitan Organization has not only transformed the physical infrastructure of the region, but also the culture," said Rev. Dr. Robert McGee, pastor at Trinity United Methodist Church. "It is easy to see the physical ways TMO has shaped the area — a dialysis clinic, overpasses, sidewalks, drainage, streets, affordable housing and the creation of Capital IDEA-Houston. More important is the transformation of thousands of TMO leaders who have worked to develop relational power across religious, ethnic and economic lines in order to act in the best interests of families. This profound change gives me hope for the future not just of TMO but for the region."

During the celebration, TMO honored three key community leaders: Archbishop Emeritus Joseph A. Fiorenza of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, Rev. William A. Lawson, founding pastor of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, and Rabbi Emeritus Samuel E. Karff of Congregation Beth Israel.

"These men exemplify fighting for justice. Through their public work to-



[LEFT] TMO honored Archbishop Emeritus Joseph A. Fiorenza and two other church leaders at their 30th anniversary celebration. [RIGHT] The keynote speaker was Ernesto Cortes Jr., Industrial Areas Foundation National co-director and TMO's first organizer.

gether they also demonstrate the need for us to reach out beyond our own communities to form relationships and work side by side with others," said Father Kevin Collins, OMI, pastor at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church. Twenty years ago at TMO's 10th anniversary Archbishop Fiorenza remarked, "I shudder of what would have happened if TMO had not existed."

The keynote speaker was Ernesto Cortes Jr., Industrial Areas Foundation National Co-Director and TMO's first

organizer.

TMO is an organization of institutions developing power and leadership among citizens in order to transform Houston. Consisting of congregations and other institutions from across the region which represent the racial, religious and economic diversity of the area, the organization builds trusting relationships between institutions and people of diverse backgrounds. It also trains leaders to organize within their institutions and to create public rela-

tionships with local policymakers that help them act for themselves for the common good of our local communities.

Jan Wilbur, TMO's first president from First Congregational United Church of Christ, said, "As we prepared for this celebration, it has been humbling to review the many past accomplishments of TMO and at the same time look around and see the new leaders carrying on the good work today." †