



Adrian Dominican Sisters

FAITH INVESTOR  
PROFILE

## Adrian Dominican Sisters

### Impact Investing Journey Overview

The [Portfolio Advisory Board](#) (PAB) advises the General Council of the Adrian Dominican Sisters in matters regarding socially responsible investing including shareholder advocacy and community investments. The Adrian Dominican Sisters—whose mission is to “seek truth, make peace, reverence life”—began their community investing journey in the 1970s recognizing they could invest their resources in accordance with their mission and values to make a lasting impact.

#### AT A GLANCE

**Denomination:** Catholic

**Location:** Adrian, MI

**Year of First Impact Investment:** 1977

**Impact Sector Focus:**

- Affordable Housing
- Small Business Development
- Sustainable Agriculture & Renewable Energy

**Geographic Impact Focus:** Global

**Impact Investing Lead:** Sister Corinne Florek, Portfolio Manager

**Website:** <https://adriandominicans.org/PAB/Portfolio-Advisory-Board>

To help achieve this dual-purpose, they made their first community investments in a community bank, a credit union, and a day care center in 1977, which was the beginning of a **45+ year journey** that continues today.

PAB's Community Investment Fund has now invested over \$37 million in high impact loans to more than 550 community-based organizations that demonstrate a commitment to social justice through alternative economic endeavors and help create sustainable jobs and affordable housing for those marginalized by the larger economy. These loans often helped catalyze further investment from other faith investors, all while achieving a 98.7% repayment rate.

***"What are our values? Are we doing this with integrity, courage, with justice, or are we doing this because the stock market says so?...The stock market is not our god."***

**- Sister Corinne Florek, Portfolio Manager**

### Key Steps Taken and Barriers Overcome Along the Impact Investing Journey

Starting in the 1970s, the Sisters, driven by a deep awareness of systemic poverty and a focus on justice, decided to invest their resources with the goal to empower people and communities. They saw these investments as part of their mission, not just stewardship of their assets. In these early years, only a few Sisters had MBAs and other skills to evaluate investments. They did a lot of listening, worked to understand a potential borrower's business model and problem they wanted to address, and became adept at evaluating investment opportunities.

Initially, PAB started lending to community organizations with a very simple promissory note, to ease the process for these relatively small first-time borrowers. There were rarely covenants, as much of what they did was built on trust. They did, however, charge interest, albeit at a below-market rate, and set regular repayment schedules to ensure borrowers understood these were indeed loans. These practices helped PAB achieve their exceptionally high repayment rate.

While there were different ideas about how best to leverage their community investments, the Sisters coalesced around the goal to invest to create systems that empower people. They not only did this with their community investing, but also with shareholder advocacy. They started using their ability as shareholders to advocate against Apartheid and began to engage more directly in dialogues with corporations about social accountability in collaboration with other faith investors. These actions complemented PAB's growing community investment strategy as they sought to democratize access to capital, investing in community development corporations, loan funds, credit unions, banks, and cooperatives, throughout the US and around the world.

This interview is part of a series of Faith Investor Profiles highlighting how institutions across denominations are investing for impact. The Profiles are for informational purposes only, and should not be construed as any financial advice nor a recommendation of any investment strategy or product. All investing carries risk, past performance is no guarantee of future results. More at: [www.calvertimpactcapital.org/faith](http://www.calvertimpactcapital.org/faith)

### Successes and New Frontiers

PAB was often a first investor in organizations, some very well known today, demonstrating a vote of confidence in their potential to serve communities. For example, PAB was the first to invest in Fahe, a CDFI dedicated to reducing poverty in Appalachia with a loan of \$35,000 in 1981; today, Fahe has directly invested more than \$1 billion in the region. PAB was a pioneering investor in Equal Exchange (fair trade), Oikocredit (microfinance), Local Enterprise Assistance Fund (cooperatives), and the Solar and Energy Loan Fund, and many community development finance institutions (CDFIs)—which keep “a finger on the pulse” of their communities. In 2000, they joined the Year of Jubilee movement and waived interest on their loans to community-based organizations.



Adrian Dominican Sisters visit staff at Seaway Bank, now part of the [Self-Help Federal Credit Union](#) family, on Chicago’s South Side to learn about their programs.

The Sisters were often asked why they choose to invest and not simply make grants to organizations in need. Their answer went beyond their commitment to provide for retired Sisters in the future. They wanted to empower organizations to be in control of their own destinies. Rather than making a one-year grant to help a group get through the year, providing a 5-year loan showed they believed the organization had a future. It also helped organizations to develop a track record of repaying the loans which they could leverage to obtain credit in the future.

The PAB continually challenges itself to find new community organizations doing innovative and critical work, especially those lacking access to capital. One of their latest investments was in partnership with RCIF ([Religious Communities Impact Fund](#)) to the Partnership for Community Action in Albuquerque, NM to build a center that will be a family-friendly campus that exemplifies community development and includes a sewing cooperative, children’s play garden, and a community space for family engagement and learning.

### Suggestions for Fellow Faith Investors

As a [longtime leader](#) in faith-based impact investing, [Sister Corinne Florek](#) offers some practical advice. If you’re starting small, try to recruit pro bono assistance from members of your faith community who have the expertise you need to begin your impact investing practice. Also, consider collaborating with other groups for administrative functions to maximize efficiency, impact, and economies of scale.

Think strategically about ways to invest locally. Sister Corinne points out that communities of faith have done this throughout history to support one another. She also suggests finding ways to support working people, especially essential workers, who the pandemic has shown to be the real backbone of our economy. She challenges all faith investors to stay true to their values, to invest with integrity and to remember the core purpose of impact investing is community impact, and not financial return.

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