“... the One who began a good work in you will continue...”

Philippians 1:6

ACTION FOR CHANGE IN A NEW ERA

See article page 4
Dear friends of Notre Dame de Namur,

Here is a poetic backdrop for all the articles in this issue of Good Works:

I find you, Lord, in all Things and in all my fellow creatures, pulsing with your life; as a tiny seed you sleep in what is small and in the vast you vastly yield yourself.

The wondrous game that power plays with Things is to move in such submission through the world: groping in roots and growing thick in trunks and in treetops like a rising from the dead.

~ Rainer Maria Rilke, German Poet, 1875-1926

Return to the poem after each story and sense the manner in which God’s power plays with all Things, especially in all our “fellow creatures, pulsing with the life [of God],” …moving in submission, never by domination or force, intimidation or manipulation. Note the labor of love and turning of the soil in the work of our Sisters and colleagues. Note that labor and nurturing, freely offered, equip and transfigure the youngest and oldest with instruments and inspiration for harmony and peace.

Look for the “Lord in all Things,” dear friends; celebrate what you find! Look for what Hildegard von Bingen, the great medieval mystic, called “Viriditas” or “Greening power of God.” Ah! Don’t hold back; let the world know that you know: God is indeed good, “groping in roots and…rising from the dead!”

Thank you for the countless ways you welcome God’s “wondrous game” to play out in, with and through you!

In God’s Goodness,

Sister Teresita Weind, SNDdeN
Congregational Leader

*Reflection of Rilke’s poem, adapted from the commentary of Ivan M. Granger*
ACTION FOR CHANGE IN A NEW ERA

By Sisters Phyllis Cook and Lucy Musembi, SNDdeN

Notre Dame in Kenya celebrates a Golden Jubilee (1965-2015), a time of gratitude for the gifts of fifty years and hope for a new future! When the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN) arrived in Kenya in 1965, education was considered a priority for the newly independent nation. Full of hopeful expectation, the country faced dramatic changes. In educating the young, the Sisters contributed much to the changing environment in the early years and throughout these fifty years.

Today in 2015, Kenya has developed enormously and is becoming gradually a developed country, despite many internal problems. Aware of increasing violence, based on discrimination within our global reality, the Sisters in the Kenya Unit realise the need to facilitate education for change. Technology has led to growth in many areas, even in the financial realm. However, the economic gap between the rich and those living in poverty increases every day.

Notre Dame Goes to Kenya

A simple conversation on the campus of Trinity College in Washington, D.C. in 1964 resulted in a new Mission in East Africa for the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. A foreign student advisor, Sr. Ann Gormly, SNDdeN welcomed a Consolata priest who was visiting two students, Perpetua and Angelica, from Kenya. Their conversation crossed continents and inspired Bishop Bessone of the Meru Diocese to invite our Sisters to teach in Kenya. In August 1965, five Sisters from the United States became the founding Sisters in the new Mission.

Notre Dame Owned Ministry

Rooted in Kenyan life, the Sisters yearn for ministries on Notre Dame owned land. Today Malava, in Kakamega Diocese, has a flourishing school opened in January 2010 with a small class of 3 year olds who are now in Class 3. The school continues to grow in modern, well-equipped classrooms. A new building is almost ready to accommodate a full elementary school with classes from Grades 1 to 8. Sisters work with a competent lay staff joined by young women, aspiring to life in Notre Dame, who assist and are being trained in this educational ministry.

Jubilee Gift of Growth

As educators, the Sisters are experiencing a call for personal, communal and societal transformation, leading to tolerance, justice and peace. During the Church’s Year of Consecrated Life, they are beginning the next chapter of life with the entire Notre Dame Congregation. Multiple blessings emanate from a religious congregation which is international. During Notre Dame’s fifty-years in Kenya, Sisters from Congo, Japan, Nigeria, United Kingdom (UK), and USA have served in various ministries for extended periods of time.

Presently, twenty-one professed Sisters carry on the legacy of the Kenya Unit. Fourteen Sisters are Kenyans. Inspired by the spirit of St. Julie, alive in the communities and ministries of Sisters, ten young women are currently discerning entrance into our Congregation.

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur
The Sisters’ ministries cross the whole range of education, not only in schools but also in the wider sense of being with people as they strive for self-reliance. A strong focus on justice and peace calls the Sisters to greater awareness of our world in crisis and to action for change in a new era. As Kenya still reels from the Garissa University attack, the Sisters look forward to acting on principles of justice and peace in their ministries among the people and in their own lives.

**Beginnings in Collaboration**

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur have always collaborated with the Church, religious congregations and local communities in their ministries in Kenya. The first five Sisters brought St. Julie Billiart’s living charism by proclaiming the **goodness of God** in small communities and expanding ministries. They began teaching at St. Mary’s Girls’ Secondary School and St. Lawrence’s Teacher Training College in Egoji. Each year, more Sisters arrived. Both primary and secondary teachers-in-training profited from the Sisters’ expertise and experience in several places, including Eregi Teachers’ Training College in Western Kenya and Kenyatta University College near Nairobi. In catechetical teams and as parish ministers, the Sisters helped to teach new methods in religious education at all levels across the country. The Sisters opened schools in the dioceses of Meru, Kakamega and Lodwar. They knew that the schools, once established, would be given to local Religious Congregations. Bishop Sulumeti Girls’ Secondary School in Kakamega is one of these schools. At the invitation of the Bishop, Sisters spent twelve years opening and grounding students in a solid education. Recently, one SNDdeN spent five years on the staff of this school which educates today over 900 young women. Two alumnae are Notre Dame Sisters who continue to spread God’s goodness.

From the beginning, the Sisters networked closely with local Congregations, and helped to establish the Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya. SNDdeN contributed to formation programs for seminarians and other women religious. Serving in very poor areas of Nairobi and Kisumu, the Sisters collaborated with the Mill Hill Fathers in assisting local communities to move towards a better quality of life.

**Children Living with Disabilities**

In different towns/cities, our Sisters have educated disabled children. Several Sisters joined the staff at St. Lucy’s School for the Blind at Egoji. Others worked with children living with disabilities in the Challenge Program in Nairobi. For ten years, St. Julie’s Centre for Disabled Children in Malava gave needed support for educating those in need. Today, the fruits of this ministry remain visible.

Our Sisters are not strangers to life in the desert. One Sister became the headmistress in Marsabit Girls’ Secondary School, a new and struggling school. Three Sisters went to Lodwar where they founded a Girls’ Primary School. One of them travelled the desert roads throughout Turkana strengthening religious education in the diocese and in helping the women become more self-sufficient. Two Kenyan Sisters first met our Sisters in Lodwar. The Sisters hope that St. Julie’s daughters will again minister in the future among the Turkana people.

**Ongoing Life in Mission**

Life in Mission relies on continuing education of the Sisters since the beginning of the Kenya Unit. Through study, the Sisters become more caring, professional teachers, knowledgeable and astute stewards of resources, effective communicators, versatile and compassionate social ministers. Education prepares Sisters for the future and moves systems to action for transformation in society and change in our Church and world.
N O T R E  D A M E  S C H O O L S  A N D  C O L L E G E S  I N  B R I T A I N

- Notre Dame High School, Glasgow
- Notre Dame Sixth Form College, Leeds
- Notre Dame Catholic College, Liverpool
- St. Julie’s Catholic High School, Liverpool
- Notre Dame RC Girls’ School, Southwark, London
See www.notredameonline.org for website addresses. Each website gives a flavor of how the heritage is being passed on to new generations.

Technology and Religious Education, held in different schools, have had amazing success. Participants have returned to their own schools with new ideas, resources and ways for taking Julie’s vision into today’s classrooms. The headteachers and senior staff are committed to partnership in the Notre Dame tradition. Future plans include the development of a Notre Dame app, a video on how each school celebrates St. Julie’s Day and a National Certificate for Volunteering.

A recent project includes the production of a video showing that the memory of Sr. Dorothy Stang is alive for students today in the school settings. In Britain, Notre Dame schools remember Sr. Dorothy in specific places named for her:
- Notre Dame, Southwark, London has a room dedicated to the education of students who learn English as a second language;
- Notre Dame, Plymouth has a building with a suite of classrooms for the teaching of English, Geography and Modern Foreign Languages;
- Notre Dame, Liverpool has a central performing space at the heart of the school;
- St. Julie’s, Liverpool has a theatre with seating for 230;
- Notre Dame, Sheffield has an Environmental Learning Centre.

Many Sisters from the United Kingdom (UK) and USA have given keynote lectures at our yearly conferences. Themes include Pilgrimage, Rivers of Notre Dame, Roots and Wings, Leadership, Online Education, St. Julie and Young People, A Global Perspective and Our Notre Dame Tradition. Several British schools participated in the international Network for Mission Conferences in Kentucky/Cincinnati and Boston, USA. Such conferences inspire administrators and faculty to a stronger commitment to education and collaboration with other Notre Dame educational ministries. One quotation lingers from the 2006 Network for Mission Conference and encourages Notre Dame educators when the times are difficult. “Suppose the best work of St. Julie is yet to come.” In the schools in Britain, Julie’s vision and mission still shape young people for the future.
Education in Haiti with Opportunity for Employment

By Sister Katherine Corr, SNDdeN,
Executive Director of Notre Dame Mission Volunteers

Notre Dame Mission Volunteers (NDMV) are partnering with Notre Dame Family Education Center in Haiti to facilitate expanded educational access and job readiness. The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN) have been serving since 2009 in La Savane, a deprived neighborhood, located in the city of Les Cayes. Serving a community that has no social safety-net nor any basic government services, the Sisters opened a Center which provides basic education, health services, and job training skills. Guided by St. Julie Billiart’s educational principles, the Mission Volunteers with the Sisters educate for life. They are involved in a multi-year effort in planning for the future. They are engaging the people of La Savane in a transformational process for more services to increase access to education, vocational training, and basic needs like clean water and food for their families.

Four full-time Mission Volunteers, recruited from the U.S. and La Savane community, are now involved throughout the year as co-leadership in literacy classes at the Center. They assist with projects related to needs outlined by the community. Inspired by commitment and energy of the people in the neighborhood, these American and Haitian volunteers work alongside nearly 200 women, adolescents, and children.

In La Savane, these Mission Volunteers:

- **Give** English classes to adolescents
- **Lead** an after-school literacy class for children
- **Teach** reading, writing, and math to children unable to afford school education
- **Oversee** a computer literacy course for young adults
- **Help** women in small craft industries already begun by teaching them math skills for these industries
- **Lead** community cleanups with people in the neighborhood

At the Center, the volunteers are currently aiding in the construction of a potable well, leading an agricultural program for young adults, and directing a meals program for students and other individuals in certain projects. One volunteer shared, “The strength of this program comes from the many people in La Savane who are involved.”

**On-going Challenges**

Haiti is currently ranked as the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere with 80% living under the poverty level, in being deprived of food security, access to clean water, education and employment. NDMV has been successful in establishing a strong partnership with the community and expanding the capacity of the Center to meet neighborhood needs. Like the country, the neighborhood, has many challenges. Most families cannot afford to send their children to school.

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*GoodWorks ~ June 2015*

*Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur*
Join Us as a Sister, Associate or Mission Volunteer

In December 2014, Sisters Mary Akinyi, Judith Lihavi, Margaret Inziani, and Praxides Awino, SNDdeN made Final Vows as Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in the Kenya Unit, which is celebrating 50 years in a Golden Jubilee Year.

La Savane Builds a Bakery

In attempting to develop a holistic learning community in the neighborhood, the Sisters and lay volunteers witness firsthand the catastrophic effect of unemployment without possibilities for job opportunities, as well as the lack of educational and physical training for the children. Families ask for help in getting meaningful employment in La Savane. Parents search to rise above these seemingly insurmountable obstacles and plead for work in order to feed their families and support education for their children.

In working closely with Sister Jeannette Pierre-Louis, SNDdeN, Director of the Center, the local Diocese, Catholic Relief Services, and with the local community, NDMV is addressing this need by establishing a small bakery enterprise. The bakery will offer the residents of La Savane a chance to learn a trade, become familiar with important business skills, and provide income for the people to pay for schooling their children. To have food for families and financial resources for educating the children is the primary goal. To build a bakery in collaboration with neighborhood leaders and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, is a shared objective for creating jobs for twelve men and women.

NDMV is currently engaged in the Haiti Project to raise $150,000 as seed money to begin initial stages for opening a bakery in La Savane. This is an enormous business enterprise, and one way out of poverty for this Haitian community, while upholding the human dignity and God-given potential of those in need.

The opening of a bakery is a tangible action for change of the Notre Dame Mission Volunteers and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur.
Changing Times in Protecting Our Planet

By Sister Claudine Dumbi, SNDdeN

Many persons together can effect global change. The responsibility for protecting our planet belongs to all of us. The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in their communities and ministries on five continents are becoming more intentionally aware of this responsibility. Today the Sisters call each other to educate themselves about “the environmental crisis, identify communal practices that adversely affect creation and commit to actions for change.” (2014 General Chapter).

They join other voices, like Pope Francis, who at the World Day for Youth in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, called for the “respect and protection of the Creation which God has confided to humankind.” As educators, the Sisters read, research, study and teach about climate change and other dangers to our earth and planetary system.

In the Congo-Kinshasa Province, the Sisters believe that protection of the environment is an essential and relevant ministry in our time. In small ways, with simple actions, the Sisters practice a respectful care of the earth in their community life and take every opportunity to help the people in their ministries to understand the implications of our endangered planet. Education is the most powerful instrument for instilling a love and care for Creation and enabling others to understand more about the future of our endangered planet.

Agriculture and Food Security

In the schools and centers, the Sisters and lay staff teach children and adults that climate change is not a curse or a punishment from God, but results from human activity or carelessness. Agriculture suffers severe damage from the highly elevated temperatures which diminish the yield in produce from useful cultivation. At the same time, these temperatures transport a proliferation of bad grasses and parasites. Any modification in the rain flow increases the probability of bad harvests from the crops in the short term and a lowering of production on a long term basis. Briefly, climate change negatively impacts agriculture and food security, especially in developing countries.

Any destruction in the environment affects most particularly those living in poverty whose living conditions are already precarious. Consequently, if nothing is done, there is the risk of a major collapse in agricultural production in poor countries. This will increase malnutrition already at elevated levels in these countries.

Education in Our Time

Since the majority of students in the schools in the Congo come from farming surroundings, the Sisters teach them good agricultural practices which respect the environment. For example, the people need to know and understand what are critical areas in preparation of the land for planting. The Sisters teach them to avoid:

- cultivating the soil which is sensitive (prone, liable) to erosion;
- burning the brush or the forest before cultivating the land;
- planting always in the same area.

Continued
Globally, complex questions surface in respecting the earth in abandoned places and protecting the planet:

- If we tell a peasant cutting the trees for making wood embers not to do it, how is he going to live?
- If we ask persons leading nomadic lives to stop exploiting the forest, where will they live?
- If we ask people living in poverty not to shelter themselves in already damaged spaces in order to avoid soil erosion, where will they go to build?
- If we ask a farmer not to cultivate the land in the same place each year, where is he going to till the soil for food?

Education includes best practices for preserving the earth. These times are difficult. All of us are responsible for the environment. What part will each person play for protecting the planet? Everyone is called to act! St. Augustine reminds us that “The times are bad, the times are difficult. Is that what the people say? We are the times. Such as we are, such are the times.”

In doing research projects on food security, Sr. Claudine Dumbi, SNDdeN uses this opportunity to talk with farmers about the environment and the disastrous consequences on agricultural production, caused by global climate warming. She counsels the farmers to eliminate cultivating practices which cause or risk further damage to the soil. She encourages them to plant trees or replace those that have been cut to meet needs for heating or building. In 2014, Sr. Claudine met 210 farmers in groups of 30 at a time: 150 farmers in the city of Kinshasa, DRC and another 60 farmers in Mbanza-Ngungu, DRC. She gave some advice for protection of the planet, care of the environment and addressed specific agricultural issues. In these group discussions, the farmers respond positively to the information provided as well as to this assistance with good farming practices for greater agricultural production.
Sisters publish a BOOK which tells the story. Since 1985, Maceió, located in Itapipoca, Ceará, Northeast in Brazil, has been an Agrarian Reform Settlement. It comprises 5,000 acres of arable lands, coconut tree plantations, sand dunes, lakes, streams and virgin beaches. The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN) have been in Maceió since the 1970s. For generations, local fishermen, farmers, lace makers and algae gatherers have occupied and cultivated the land and sea providing them with all they need to sustain a simple lifestyle. These courageous and faith-filled people have faced numerous challenges over the years. The first and most significant was their historical struggle for land rights during the early 1980’s. They call this time of unity their Holy or Sacred Resistance, when they liberated their land from unjust and illegal “landlords.” The generation that lived through this oppression asks to preserve this story and pass it on to their grandchildren; “…so that they will remember that we, their grandparents, faced a very difficult challenge, a sacred struggle, so that today they can live on free land, and appreciate how this land was liberated…”

The people recall how they met together to study the story of Moses and the Israelites in the Bible: “We discovered that the people of God… lived the same kind of slavery and oppression that we were living… and finally liberated themselves. And we discovered that we, as a people of God, must imitate their struggle for liberation.” They reflect on the Book of Joshua and how the People of God… passed on their story of struggle to future generations. The 12 tribes of Israel cross the River Jordan, with dry feet; Joshua orders one person from each tribe to carry and place one stone with the other stones, on the other side of the river.

“Why these stones for Maceió? To remember and tell your children that you gathered these stones and carried them over the river, with dry feet in order to recall the hand of Yahweh as he led you… to a new, free land.”

In those days, they did not write or record. So the stones were the way to remember. We, today, have paper, pens and recorders, our stones... they can tell our story.

Sisters Collaborate with People
The challenge in this book is to “gather the stones.” Sr. Mary Alice McCabe, SNDdeN has organized an Oral History based on 60 interviews, in Gathering the Stones: Maceió’s Story of Resistance - A Story of Faith. In Maceió settlement since the 1980’s, Sr. Mary Alice has compiled the stories of resistance and victory told by the people themselves. In thirteen chapters, the people describe their lives as veritable slaves under the domination of local tyrannical landlords. They discover in the Bible the God of the oppressed who gives them courage to confront injustice and transform the land and their lives. They tell about their struggles to live according to collective values on the newly liberated land. Twelve interviews are a study on collective values, contributed by Sisters Lorraine Connell and Ellen Dabrieo, SNDdeN after these Sisters had spent several months with the people in 1993.

Youth Ministry Today
Sr. Lucyane Ribeiro Diniz, SND, (Lu) is currently developing a dynamic mission with the youth, where through theatre, music and art, they are discovering new ways of recapturing key “stones” of Maceió’s story. Sr. Lucyane says: “It is always a challenge to pass on the story of a people to future generations. Our Theatre Group, Seeds of Art, is producing a play based on Maceió’s story of resistance and faith. Our goal is not only to gather the stones but also to inspire the new generation to continue the work of liberation and transformation begun by their ancestors.”

Gathering the Stones: Story in Maceió, Brazil
By Sisters Lucyane Ribeiro Diniz, Betsy Mary Flynn & Mary Alice McCabe, SNDdeN
SNDdeN Mission

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, women with hearts as wide as the world, make known God’s goodness and love of the poor through a Gospel way of life, community and prayer.

Continuing a strong educational tradition, we take our stand with poor people, especially women and children, in the most abandoned places.

Each of us commits her one and only life to work with others to create justice and peace for all.

St. Julie’s characteristic phrase: “How good is the good God!” expressed her special gift of unique trust in God. Today Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur on five continents make known God’s goodness.

Africa
Democratic Republic of Congo
Congo Brazzaville
Kenya

Nigeria
South Africa
South Sudan
Zimbabwe

Europe
Belgium
France
Italy
United Kingdom

Latin America
Brazil
Nicaragua
Peru

North America
Haiti
United States
(27 states and the District of Columbia)

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- Read our stories
- Share in our hope
- Rejoice in God’s goodness

Visit international Web sites of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur at:
www.sndden.org  ~  www.notredameonline.org  ~  www.ndvs.org