Seeds Bear Fruit in Brazil

See article page 4

“unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies...”

John 12:24
Dear friends of Notre Dame,

Each year we open this harvest month of November with the Feast of All Saints, celebrating the harvest and holiness of humanity. The litany of saints grows longer day by day as we focus on the lives of the holy men and women who are or who were “the change they want(ed) to see in the world.” During Sacramental and Vow Celebrations, memorials and rites of burial, the litany frequently includes the names of family members, living and deceased, who are or were instrumental in the lives of those celebrating. At the bedside, children still kneel each evening to thank God and ask for God’s blessing for the proximate and living saints who graced their day. Our litanies of saints are as open ended as you and we choose them to be.

In this issue of Good Works you will recognize a few names you have seen before, and some names that are new. All those named and the unnamed thousands who support our ministries have some active role in sowing seeds that bear fruit in the harvest of justice.

We thank you for being in our litany of saints, named and remembered daily in the homes and centers where we pray for and with you. In particular, we ask for your prayer as we, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, renew our commitment “to be women of justice and peace in the midst of the inequality and violence of our world.”

Be assured that you are in the prayer rooted in our hearts and articulated in the words Gandhi gave us:

“Be the change you want to see in the world!”

In God’s Goodness,

Sister Teresita Weind, SNDdeN
Congregational Leader
By Sister Jane Dwyer, SNDdeN

In February 2015, we will remember the 10th Anniversary of the death of Sister Dorothy Stang, SNDdeN. During the years since her assassination, daily life has burst forth even in the midst of continued violence and threatening situations. Sr. Dorothy was murdered, but her life and work have taken root in the hearts of the people in Brazil. Hope abounds in signs of new growth. When Sr. Dorothy died, there were 35 basic Christian communities; today there are more than 85 communities who live daily the Gospel message. In 2005, the Projects for Sustainable Development (PDS) were fragile, just beginning. These projects for developing and cultivating the land, as well as protecting the rights of farmers in building their livelihoods were in beginning stages. Today, individuals and families, living and working in an ecological way in the forest, plant gardens on small plots of land. They take responsibility in defending a major forest surrounding this land and where they can only work together. Now there are more than 450 families in the two projects, many who have electricity and well-built homes. In the last ten years, more than 1,200 families have occupied government lands destined for agrarian reform. Their insistence has more or less secured their right to remain on the land until judicial questions are resolved. Schools appear as the people organize and demand them. Roads are at least passable in most cases.

On February 12, Sr. Dorothy’s anniversary, the Sisters and people will remember and relive the shock and pain of her murder, the fear and violence which haunted us during 2005. We will remember the empty chair at our table and at meetings, the lilting laugh and adventurous spirit so brutally silenced. We recall also, in the aftermath of Sr. Dorothy’s murder, that the local radio hounded the parish and land pastoral team and terrorized the people. The local media portrayed Dorothy, the people and the Sisters as the culprits, who were getting what we deserved. The Sisters had no vehicle through which we could respond or question. We bore the calumny and terrible lies. The population was fearful and we did not know whom to trust. As the years passed, we made 9 trips to Belém for the trials of Sr. Dorothy’s murderers, always with 2 or 3 busloads of people, and always with police protection. During the first two trials, we camped out in the park area in front of the judicial building in simple tents put up by the Dorothy Committee and their friends who always welcomed us with open hearts and hands.

Committee Formed

In May 2005, a friend helped the Sisters look for farms to landless families for the benefit of sustainable farming systems. With this project, the Dorothy Committee in Defense of Anapu was born. This Committee is an open forum in which the people participate at will. The people bring the agenda, usually conflicts over land and preservation of the forest. Quality education in the rural area is also a high priority. The Committee meets monthly, usually with 80 to 120 participants. We begin with a “mística,” a sharing of the reasons for meetings as well as our goals. These reflections and shared encounters with our beliefs have kept us alive and hopeful during these years.
Independence Day

September 7 was Independence Day in Brazil, celebrated with parades which include participation of school children. In earlier years, Sisters and friends tried to include a poster of Sr. Dorothy in the September parade but were refused, and even fled in fear. The Independence Day parade, even with children, was under the control of the military and local government authorities. Sr. Dorothy and anyone associated with her were excluded from participation in the parade. This year, banners of Sr. Dorothy Stang were a highlight of the parade, with a celebration of the people of Anapu: their lives, work, and hopes. Young adults paraded their lives and beliefs in the streets. Small family farmers, fishermen, strong women in the agricultural community, and indigenous peoples joined in the celebration. In the parade, they highlighted two major crops of cacao (chocolate) and acai, for Anapu.

The Seed Dies and Gives New Life

Over 10 years, changes have occurred slowly and tangibly. The people previously oppressed and repressed, take on their own destiny today. Without violence, they do not back down when basic principles are the issue or question. The people are unafraid in confronting loggers, gunmen, ranchers or local authorities who threaten the planet and the lives of their families. They have learned to do so with strategies and organized strength. When the official channels of communication are closed to them, they find or create unofficial new ways to communicate. The people now challenge any violent deaths which continue to be a reality. Citizens in Anapu give financial contributions to pay for bus trips to Belém so that the Sisters and people are present for the trials of those who killed Sr. Dorothy. The people challenge injustices and sustain a profound and irrepressible hope and belief in the future, their future...a future they remember and reverence as Sr. Dorothy’s legacy to them.

Forest Pilgrimage

Every year, the annual Forest Pilgrimage in July is a time to travel the road of Sr. Dorothy’s last journey. This annual pilgrimage has become cultural patrimony in the state of Pará. February 12 is now a holiday in Anapu, a day on which to remember and celebrate Sr. Dorothy’s life and all that has been accomplished in her journey in life and death. Many people are in solidarity with this journey for profound justice leading to true and lasting peace. Sr. Dorothy is a symbol of the defense and protection of human rights. The Sisters continue to reflect on her life, its meaning and power in their lives and the life of the Brazilian people in Anapu. Sr. Dorothy Stang lives on in the people who pray to her, honor her memory and imitate this holy woman, a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur.

Sr. Jane Dwyer, SNDdeN, and a woman in the village, prepare the food for the pilgrims during the July Forest Pilgrimage.
Meet Our New Congregational Leadership Team

From July 12 through August 2, 2014, a hundred Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN) gathered at Trinity Washington University in Washington, D.C., USA. At this General Chapter, the highest decision-making body in the Congregation, the Sisters accepted the challenge of being “called to be women of justice and peace in the midst of the inequality and violence in our world.”

In late July, the Chapter participants rejoiced in the election of the new Congregational Leadership Team (CLT) to carry forward the Chapter directions. The Chapter delegates re-elected Sister Teresita Weind (USA), a member of the Ohio Province, as the Congregational Leader for a second term of six years. They elected also four other members of a new Team: Sisters, Liliane Sweko, also re-elected, (Democratic Republic of Congo), Patricia O’Brien (Britain), Maureen White (USA), and Masheti Wangoyi (Kenya) to serve the Congregation from 2014-2020. The delegates recognized the gifts, education and wealth of experience of each member of the team.

Completing six years in Congregational Leadership, Sisters Teresita and Liliane, previous to their election in 2008, had served in leadership roles: Sr. Teresita as Moderator in the Ohio Province and Sr. Liliane, Formation Director in Zimbabwe-South Africa Province. For the past five years, Sr. Patricia has been the British Province Moderator. Sr. Maureen has been the Director of Educational Services at Hope Community Center in Apopka, Florida. Sr. Masheti, currently finishing her thesis for a Ph.D. from the Roskilde University in Denmark, was the Kenya Province Moderator before beginning doctoral studies in health management.

With collective experience in spirituality, theology, formation, education, catechetics, liturgy and music ministry, health care and pastoral care, the new Team will lead more than 1,300 Sisters on five continents during the next six years. These five members of the CLT, meeting in Rome will assume responsibility for our religious congregation on December 12, 2014.
The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, "women with hearts as wide as the world," are a joyful, caring and healing presence at Bishop Murray Medical Centre in Makurdi, Nigeria. By their service to a wide population of persons, they bring hope to sick and vulnerable women, men and children living in poverty. The Sisters minister diligently and radiate the goodness of God at this Centre. Directed and owned by the Catholic Diocese, the Bishop invited the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur to minister at Bishop Murray Medical Centre. In April 2002, a new SND community was formed and in April 2003, the Diocese handed over the management of the Medical Centre to the Sisters of Notre Dame. Since that time, three Sisters have been administrators. The diocese facilitates the affairs of Catholic health facilities, with a priest as Health Coordinator, managing an Integrated Health Programme with different facilities meeting health needs in the diocese. Patients from all walks of life come to the Sisters for care and healing at Bishop Murray Centre which now has one hundred and twenty-four beds.

**Primary Services**

The Medical Centre provides naturally made food supplements and dietary education to mothers of malnourished children, special injections for babies to immunize them against deadly childhood diseases, and regular immunizations against hepatitis B for adults. Frequently, the Sisters go to the villages in the interior to provide care for people without any means of transportation, who are unable to access medical care in the cities. Through this initiative, some villages, therefore, have become Primary Health Centres.

**Obstetrics/Gynaecology**

Pregnant women appreciate the presence of Sisters of Notre Dame who register, give care and direction through the safe delivery of their babies and in follow-up consultations. During the first visits, the Sisters and staff gather the necessary data, with initial medical and laboratory examinations for the care of the mothers and their unborn babies. They insure regular appointments; with instruction and education for these expectant mothers on a variety of subjects, such as dietary needs, exercises, clothing, body signs during pregnancy and labour, what to avoid and significant needs for delivery. These sessions help expectant mothers gain knowledge and dispel unnecessary fears imposed by different belief systems which surround pregnancy and childbirth. With adequate knowledge, these women are able to care for themselves and their babies. Most of the women registered at the Medical Centre deliver their babies in the facility, while some deliver at home or in other hospitals. Others who have not registered arrive for immediate care at the Centre when in labour.

**Anti-Retroviral Therapy**

In a challenging contemporary ministry, the Centre treats people living with HIV/AIDS. This area of Nigeria where the Sisters live and work has the greatest number of people in the country living with HIV/AIDS. In this facility alone, more than eight thousand persons have registered for medical attention. The Sisters are involved in giving hope and care to these vulnerable individuals; they help them find meaning in life by giving them care.
and confidence in the goodness of God. With treatments, many mothers with HIV/AIDS give birth to babies free of the disease. These clients, once accessed and enrolled, often more than a hundred a day, come to the Centre for appointments and medical treatments. Currently, the USA Government, in a project called Pepfa (President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief), provides free anti-retroviral drugs. The majority of infected persons in Nigeria would be unable to pay the high cost of these drugs which have saved many lives. The Sisters and staff help the clients to form support groups where they share related experiences and find support from others with this health condition.

**Challenges**

The Medical Centre, belonging to the Church, does not receive any financial or social support from the Nigerian Government. Staff attrition results from the inability of Church-owned facilities to compete with the salaries of government-owned institutions. The Sisters seek funding through grants and any other resources to pay workers and maintain the existing structures. Their greatest challenge is not being able to reach out to many people living in poverty who have no money to pay for their medical needs. As a result, many persons spend some weeks in the hospital, while praying and waiting for financial assistance for medical treatments. Some individuals are fortunate when someone comes along and pays a part or a full medical bill. Others remain unable to pay for surgery or treatment and leave without the necessary care. The Sisters at this Centre aim to make medical services available and affordable for deprived and vulnerable individuals. They offer care, compassion and healing to all those who look for their help. The Sisters “choose to stand with people made poor in a world marked by increasing divisions and inequalities.” They proclaim God’s goodness in serving the needs of Nigerian people through health care and education.
Each day brings a new reason to rejoice in the Notre Dame–AmeriCorps (NDA) program! Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and our staff praise the commendable service of volunteers, or the remarkable achievements of people served by volunteers. The gifts of community, partnership, and countless chances to learn together are blessings and opportunities to reach new parts of the country. During this year (2014-15), Notre Dame–AmeriCorps celebrates an important anniversary! Another year of service marks 20 years of a public-private partnership that has allowed us to expand our commitment to walk with those living in poverty. Over the past two decades, Notre Dame–AmeriCorps members have provided critical resources and support, with a special priority for education, to over 600,000 individuals nationwide.

Growth

In September of 1994, President Bill Clinton, with bi-partisan support, launched AmeriCorps, a government agency that supports community service initiatives. It engages over 75,000 members annually in full-time service at schools and community service organizations across the country. Sister Katherine Corr, SNDdeN, Executive Director of Notre Dame Mission Volunteers, has noted that when AmeriCorps started, Notre Dame Mission Volunteers were right there and ready to join. Since then, the Notre Dame–AmeriCorps program has been growing. The first Notre Dame–AmeriCorps team consisted of just a handful of members in four cities. Today, there are 400 members in 23 cities nationwide. Since its inception, NDA members have worked tirelessly to support hundreds of schools and other organizations in underserved neighborhoods across America. Many of these agencies emphasize every year how NDA members are vital to their work.

Common Good for Social Justice

In September 2014, Sr. Katherine, with the Notre Dame–AmeriCorps Site Director, Jim Coleman, and the volunteer team in Washington DC, were invited to the White House for a special ceremony to recognize the contributions of AmeriCorps members over the past two decades. This nationwide event included remarks from four US Presidents who thanked AmeriCorps members for their exemplary service. President Barack Obama affirmed the commitment of our members by a reminder that service is “the opportunity to… work together for something bigger, for the common good.”
Following the White House Lawn Event, the Site Director in Washington, DC explained that for most members, “it is hard to understand your role in the National Service Movement, something too abstract to simply feel…[this event] helped us to feel interconnected on a local and national level.” Throughout the life of our Notre Dame–AmeriCorps Program, so many individuals have been privileged to be part of this movement and to witness the moment when they realize that they are “working together for something bigger.”

Over the last two decades, the impact of each NDA member is awe-inspiring in its own way. Every member has encouraged a student, a parent, or a community member, who then has reached out to a friend or relative. Daily actions ripple into waves of progress, and spill into the hearts of the communities where volunteers serve. Contributions made by NDA members are more than the influence of one individual place; they are a part a broader social justice movement, and an extension of the Sisters’ mission in the US. Together, the Sisters, the AmeriCorps program, and NDA members have consistently demonstrated a love for those living in poverty and a commitment to give many individuals equal access to education. Through Notre Dame Mission Volunteers, the Sisters of Notre Dame have worked “to be women of justice and peace in the midst of the inequality and violence in our world.” They look forward to what the future will bring through Notre Dame Mission Volunteers in the United States and beyond!

For more information, visit Notre Dame Mission Volunteers’ Website: www.ndmva.org

Your donations support and sustain our worldwide Mission on five continents.

The Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN) is a charitable institution with 501©3 status in the United States. Contributions support our Mission in a variety of ministries across the world.

How to support our Mission?

- Give Charitable Gift Annuities
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Website: www.sndden.org
Asylum Link Merseyside in Liverpool

By Sister Kathleen Ashurst, SNDdeN

In 2000, the UK Government decided that hundreds of Asylum Seekers should be dispersed across the country from the South East corner where they had been placed, awaiting decisions on their applications to stay in the country. No provision had been made however for their many needs in the rest of the country.

**Who are Asylum Seekers?**

Asylum Seekers are people forced to leave their own countries because of political, religious or social persecution. They leave everything: home, family, possessions, jobs, future, culture and language. To save their lives, they leave all they know and love. In awaiting decisions for acceptance of their pleas for asylum, the UK allocates accommodation but does not allow Asylum Seekers to work but gives them £35 per week for food, transport and everything else. Sadly, there is a great deal of prejudice against Asylum Seekers. People see them as foreign “scroungers” and confuse them with migrant workers, who come to work, earn money, and then can go home whenever they want. Asylum Seekers have practically no money and will probably never go home, unless situations change completely in their countries.

In Liverpool, Craig and Kate Barnett, with a few friends, decided to open a drop-in social and help Centre for Asylum Seekers, on Friday afternoons. In a church hall, St. Peter’s in the Kensington area, they opened *Kensington Welcome*. When the needs of Asylum Seekers developed increasingly, the Centre had to expand. In 2001, Kensington Welcome became *Asylum Link Merseyside (ALM)*; it was called ‘Link’ to show collaboration and cooperation with every agency willing to help. The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur gave financial assistance to launch ALM. As a founding member, Sr. Kathleen Ashurst, SNDdeN, helped ALM to move to a little used presbytery, St. Anne’s, in Liverpool 8, a poor area of the city. With the support of the parish priest, Fr. Peter Morgan, ALM opened its doors to Asylum Seekers during 5 days each week. More volunteers, including Sisters of Notre Dame, began to help at the Centre.

**Involvement of Sisters of Notre Dame**

Today, ALM has a manager, Ewan Roberts, 4 staff and 90 volunteers, many of whom are themselves Asylum Seekers, unpaid but given expenses. Asylum Seekers of 60 different nationalities come to ALM where the staff offer English classes and individual advice with every kind of problem from cockroaches to helping those refused in Court. ALM provides breakfast and lunch, clothes, furniture, bikes, weekly bags of food for destitute people, and arranges table tennis teams, days out, and celebrations. St. Anne’s Presbytery is Catholic Christian but ALM has no religion base. No one asks about religion. If people need help or want to give help, that is what is necessary to enter. In September 2014, **2790 needy and weary individuals, people from 60 nationalities, walked through our doors.**

Over these years, Sisters have helped in all kinds of work: reception, kitchen, advice-giving, visiting, organising, and providing furniture. Currently, four Sisters are involved and their ministry centers around a Sales’ program. Formerly, clothes were given free to Asylum Seekers. However, ALM’s money nearly ran out. Without any Government grants, the Centre had to put in bids to charitable funders. We cut our costs by reluctantly deciding to open only four days a week. We also began to have Sales. We sort everything that people contribute and organise clothes, shoes, bedding, towels, toys, CDs, household goods, cooking utensils, etc. as in a shop. The prices are very low, making items affordable for Asylum Seekers: £2 for jackets, coats, £1 for trousers, shirts, 50p for children’s clothes. What we cannot sell at Sales, we sell for rags. The Sales have become popular, social occasions. By June 2013, we raised £14,000; by June 2014, we raised £17,000. If someone is impoverished, we do give all items without cost.

Our aim at ALM is to restore human dignity to Asylum Seekers. Having fled for safety, they have lost everything they had built or owned, including their place in society. Being treated like outcasts, during months and even years, has often destroyed their self-esteem. Unable to be employed, they experience depression and a sense of worthlessness. As Sisters, “We see the value of human life diminished…and intolerance to people perceived to be different.” We recognize our ministry in Merseyside as a call to restore the dignity of each person, by treating individuals as worthwhile, valuable human beings. Ever new waves of Asylum Seekers from the world’s many wars, challenge us to keep on keeping on!
**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.

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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.

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**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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