

Good Works

Worldwide Mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

Empowering Young Women in Zimbabwe

See article page 4



“They are to do good, to be rich in good works...”

| Timothy 6: 18

My dear friends of Notre Dame,

All of us have experienced the sheer goodness in one person after another, the utter joy of simple events, the complete surprise of honesty, truth, transparency and vulnerability. These ordinary, yet sacred moments have brought the nearness of *Christ-in-the-flesh* among us. As Christian disciples, we rejoice when we recognize these moments, reflect on them, and share them with others.



This issue of **Good Works** is a vivid illustration of simple events that transform lives, empower the young in the present and give them hope for their future and inspiration to assist others. As you reflect on the images you see and the stories you read, pray with and for us, for the people with whom we serve, and for the many we hope to reach through your love and support for Notre Dame:

Give us, O Lord, steadfast hearts which nothing can drag downwards,
 unconquered hearts, firm in the face of tribulation,
 upright hearts, able to withstand deception and illusion.
 Bestow upon us, O Lord, understanding to know you,
 diligence to seek you, wisdom to find you, and
 faithfulness to welcome you in whatever way you come.
 Amen.

In God's Goodness,

Teresita Weind, SNDdeN

Sister Teresita Weind, SNDdeN
 Congregational Leader



Front Cover:

Sr. Ann of St. Rita Doyle (right) teaches young women the skill of making a scarf as the housemother (second from left) encourages these students in the joy of learning. All join in being "rich in good works."



- 4 Empowering Young Women in Zimbabwe



- 8 99 Years and Counting at St. Jerome Parish

GoodWorks

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- 10 Sisters Care for Orphans in the Congo



- 14 Time, Care, and Compassion: Gifts in Pajaro Valley, CA



- 18 Sharing SNDdeN Spirituality through Technology

Empowering Young Women in Zimbabwe

By Sister Meltah Thaka, SNDdeN

Having been ministering in Zimbabwe since 1899, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN) have made education a primary focus. Called by the 2008 General Chapter to *“recommit enthusiastically to Julie’s call to educate for life,”** the Sisters in our ZimSA Province (Zimbabwe/South Africa)



Sr. Meltah Thaka, SNDdeN gives a geography lesson on Africa to two students and teaches them about the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur on five continents.

made a commitment to rescue young women, who are victims of poverty, abuse and sex trade. We were determined to help these girls finish their high school education. Injustices witnessed in a few towns in Zimbabwe in 2011 reinforced our goal to stand with *“exploited...marginalized and abused women and children – especially girls.”** From experience, we saw young women migrating into urban areas where they were becoming victims of abuse and exploitation by men, exchanging money for sex with the girls who use it for food,

school fees and fashionable clothing. We recognized also that young women are six times more likely to contract HIV/AIDS than their male counterparts and some even die from AIDS related diseases. So, our Province agreed to support a trial project for the education of the girl child, by using appropriately our human and other resources.

Educating for Life in Cuvilly Home

In January 2012, the Sisters screened and accepted 8 girls from rural areas around Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. The girls had dropped out of school because of various circumstances in their lives, including financial constraints and inability to get to school from home.

*2008 Chapter Calls, pp. 5, 7



Five young women benefit from the care of a housemother (second from the left) and from the teaching and direction of Sr. Meltah Thaka, SNDdeN (third from the right).

Leaving home at 5.30 a.m. for school and returning in the evening at 7.00 p.m., without any means of transport, these girls walked 10 to 16 kilometers every day. We welcomed them to the Cuvilly residence, owned and staffed by SNDdeN. A former student from our school in Kroonstad, South Africa came for a month to assist the girls in small things, such as making beds, setting the table and welcoming visitors into the house. The girls take turns preparing meals and cleaning the house and the compound. Sr. Meltah Thaka helps the young women to understand how to make a realistic budget for the year. At home in Cuvilly, the young women are under the supervision of a housemother, a teacher from St. Bernard School. As a community project, the young women have a vegetable garden. Water is a problem due to its rationing. Every weekend the girls take turns going to fetch water at a bore hole (well) in Manningdale, in another suburb. In the morning, they do gardening and then after lunch have lessons in Bible Study and English with Sister Ann of St. Rita Doyle. At home, near school, the girls have more time to concentrate on their studies. They eat properly. Sr. Meltah works to insure that their needs are met at home and in school. They belong to the church choir. They have a netball team and even played and lost a match with the police wives.

Education liberates, empowers and enables choices.

Continued

Facing Challenges and Enjoying Successes

Some young women are really struggling with emotional trauma. They come from very impoverished families with difficult life experiences requiring assistance from professional counselors. At the end of last year, we determined that four girls would do better in skills work



rather than academic studies. Only two of these girls returned to school this year. Another young woman joined them because she could not afford money to continue her studies. All three are doing quite well in the skills course and enjoying cutting and designing. With borrowed manual and electric machines, they have just finished making skirts and are working on blouses. They have dreams for returning home where they want to build a two-room house for their work as seamstresses. We pray they will pursue the dream.

We see much improvement, growth and self-confidence. They now have higher expectations of themselves in all areas.

At the end of the year, another three girls will take an exam to qualify for a certificate recognised by the Ministry of Education and then be affiliated to a Catholic Registered Centre. We engage a tutor to teach them daily in the convent.

We have creatively turned a garage into a classroom. It has been a big jump for them, from a rural school to a town school and from a little thatched hut to a spacious house. They are learning to use the facilities and equipment and want also to know more about farming.



Determined to do well in school, they speak English most of the time, stand in public and deliver speeches. It is remarkable how the girls have grown in self-confidence.

The escalation of costs for essential commodities, utilities, school fees and food is a great challenge for us. At the beginning, parents/guardians of the girls agreed to contribute to their up-keep.



Sr. Ann of St. Rita Doyle, SNDdeN, helps in the school and also teaches the young women in Cuvilly.

During the first term, this worked but then became impossible because the region was hard hit by drought and parents struggled to feed their families. Now the project depends entirely on donations sent by the Congregation and some local friends.

We rely only on these resources and God's grace to survive. Sr. Meltah, the housemother and two girls went for a one-day intensive course in breeding, with the hope of starting a poultry farm with the girls in March.

Education Empowers

Our project aims at enabling young women to stand against inequality towards the girl child. In rural Zimbabwe, society and even parents favour boys by giving them all possible opportunities for education and development. Women are considered the property of men and treated as second class citizens, staying at home only to cook and bear children.



Sr. Faustina Agustino, SNDdeN (third from the left) helps the young women with their homework.

Education liberates, empowers and enables choices... It is a joy to see timid young women growing and being able to express themselves freely. These girls are benefitting from a solid education for life. When they go back to their homes, they will have much to share. Hopefully they will make a difference and become vital members of their communities.

We know that St. Julie Billiart smiles as young women become empowered and uplifted through skills training and education for life.

99 Years and Counting at St. Jerome Parish

By Sister Geraldine McPhee, SNDdeN



Sunflowers blossom in our garden and each day our doors open to allow the babies and little ones to come into their "home away from home." We believe that **St. Jerome Child Center** answers each day the call of Jesus to "*let the little ones*" come to him.

At the invitation of the pastor, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN) came in 1914 to St. Jerome Parish in Hyattsville, Maryland to take charge of the Sunday School. In 1943, Sisters Margaret Loyola and Marie Sylvia opened a school. Today, three of us serve in this parish: Sr. Janet Cahill, retired second-grade teacher in St. Jerome's, currently tutors children; Sr. Mary Theresa Day serves on the Parent Advisory Board; I am the Director of Child Care. Continuing the ministry of SNDdeN at St. Jerome's, we are anticipating a 100 year celebration in 2014!

Sisters Respond to Changing Needs

From 1914 until 1943, we staffed the catechetical program. In 1943, Sr. Margaret Loyola and Sister Marie Sylvia opened St. Jerome School; they traveled about 30 miles each day from Ilchester to Hyattsville, MD to teach in the school. In September 1944, the first Mass was celebrated in the chapel of the Wheatley mansion, a convent for the Sisters. The school prospered. By May 1961 fourteen sisters, in a newer convent, taught 1,100 children! In 1984, when only six sisters were living in the convent, Sr. Joyce Volpini, Principal of St. Jerome's, envisioned using extra space for a Child Center.



Sisters Janet Cahill and Geraldine McPhee, SNDdeN enjoy a snack on the playground with the "little ones."



The members of the Parents' Advisory Board give significant input for child care to Sisters Geraldine McPhee and Mary Theresa Day, SNDdeN at St. Jerome's.

Child Care Center Meets Current Needs

The opening of the Child Center in 1985 was a significant year in my ministerial life. Having been an Early Childhood teacher for 15 years, I became Director of the St. Jerome Child Center. Throughout the past 27 years, the center has grown in leaps and bounds! In the past, the neighborhood was mainly comprised of "homestead" families. Presently, the construction of town-houses with metro availability and the new businesses coming into the neighborhood have placed a demand for child care. From a small invasion of seven babies in the convent in 1985, our center now occupies the entire first floor and the lower level. We have seven rooms, infant, toddler, and preschool providing care for 75 babies and toddlers, ages 6 weeks to four years old.

We try to create a loving, safe, caring center which says to parents that these little ones are being nurtured and educated for life. "We do believe in children." We consider ourselves blessed to follow in the footsteps of over 200 Sisters who have brought God's goodness and St. Julie Billiart to the children and parents. The people of St. Jerome's Parish love and respect the Sisters. They often express happiness in having "Sisters" serving, living in their parish and promoting St. Julie's vision for education.

"Like a sunflower...we turn to follow you, our God!"

Please visit our web site: www.stjeromechildcenter.org



The children surround Sr. Geraldine for story time.

Sisters Care for Orphans in the Congo

By Sister Marie-Jeanne Kuntonda, SNDdeN



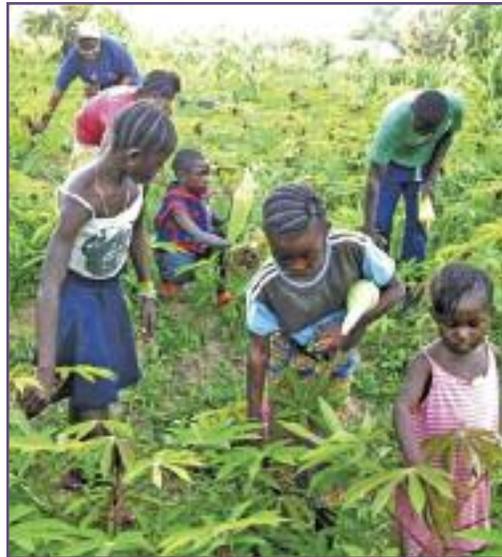
Sr. Jeannette Nkanga, SNDdeN feeds an infant in the hospital in Ngidinga.

Women in Congo bear the load of work in the home and in the fields. Women fetch wood, find food and prepare daily meals while attending to all the needs for their families. The work continues even while women are pregnant. Lack of good nutrition, poverty, malaria, infectious diseases, complications of HIV/AIDS and the

inaccessibility of good health care contribute to high mortality of women following the birth of their babies. The babies become abandoned orphans, left to fend for themselves without food, clothing, shelter or education. The Sisters have assumed responsibility for more than 50 orphans in the towns and villages where we minister: Kimwenza, Kisantu, Kisenso, Kitenda, Lemfu, Mpese, Ngidinga, Nselo and Pelende.



We are daughters of St. Julie who devoted herself to the care of orphans at the beginning of our Congregation.



Sr. Sylvie Nkosi, SNDdeN shows three little children how to till the soil and plant the seeds, (top photo) while Sr. Marie-Jeanne Kuntonda, SNDdeN helps the orphans in harvesting the vegetables (bottom photo).

Sisters of Notre Dame Face Challenges

In Ngidinga, the Sisters of Notre Dame are responsible for twenty orphans. The three youngest children are 10 months old. The two eldest are older boys in the last class of secondary school; they are 18 and 19 years old. With familial care, resources from our work and gifts from donors, we help these orphans in their growth and education, so that they may be eventually integrated into society. Many miseries in our society result from orphaned children. Taking responsibility for these orphans constitutes a great challenge. Our clinics and schools provide medical care and educational fees for the children which is an enormous relief for their extended families. The Sisters require physical, psychological, moral and spiritual energy to face the stress of trying to provide personal care and attention, as well as material necessities for these children.

The sharing of resources in Notre Dame enables us to give the orphans assistance for education, basic human needs, and help them become responsible



The orphans love to gather around Sr. Patience Mpela, SNDdeN while playing around the convent in Ngidinga.

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members in society. We teach them to work in order to take charge of their own lives later in the future. The older children work in the fields and gardens. The younger children prepare juice which they sell to provide money for some food.

The greatest challenge for the Sisters is help the orphans move beyond inadequate conditions.

✿ We keep four orphans close to us because there is not a single family member able to take care of them. These four are all in one room with the little they have as personal possessions.

✿ We are concerned about responsible care of the baby orphans, before entrusting them to their extended families at an early age. We want to protect them from infectious diseases which kill children from birth to 5 years of age in the Congo.

✿ We do not have a single space to teach our orphans how to read write, nor how to manage a home.

We are concerned about young women who are beyond school age and have been abandoned. These young women are numerous. As the other orphans, they need St. Julie's care and concern in our time. We look for ways and means to teach them how to survive as useful members of society. The Sisters are searching for a viable solution.



Caring for twin babies is a joy and happy responsibility for Sr. Henriette Ngengi, SNDdeN.



Notre Dame Mission Volunteers-AmeriCorps members participate in the Martin Luther King Parade in Apopka, FL. These volunteers and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur provide a variety of services to and for Farmworkers and their families.

*Join us
as a vowed member,
associate or mission volunteer!*



Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur
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www.SNDdeN.org

Time, Care, and Compassion: Gifts in Pajaro Valley, CA

By Sisters Theresa Linehan and Rosa Dolores Rodriguez, SNDdeN

A

fter the 1989 earthquake in California, Sr. Rosa Dolores Rodriguez realized the need for a more concentrated effort to serve a small community in the Pajaro Valley. At that time, little or no social and health care services existed there. With help from some Hispanic volunteers, Sr. Rosa Dolores began outreach services in a trailer, next to the Church, for a majority population of struggling Mexican-American, and indigenous Oaxacan immigrants, who had crossed the southern US borders. This was the beginning of a vibrant ministry of health care, social work and education which continues today with direct service and through technology. On October 1, 1996, **Casa de la Cultura Center** replaced the trailer and opened its doors in offering more social and health care services.

As a faith-based resource center, the center's goal and vision include continual assessment of social, economic and health needs of the community and reaching out wherever the Sisters are able to extend assistance. Over the years, the emphasis on services has evolved according to the perceived and real needs of the community at the time.



Sr. Rosa Dolores Rodriguez, SNDdeN, with lay volunteers, gathers the workers for an educational session on health care and legal advocacy.

The communities of Pajaro and Las Lomas are depressed areas, the poorest in Monterey County, CA. Most residents in the area are low-wage earners, seasonal agricultural laborers, working either in the fields and/or in nurseries. The "Oaxacans," new immigrants from the State of Oaxaca in Mexico, do not know either Spanish or English. They speak only native Mexican languages which seriously limit possibilities for employment, except in farming. **During the winter months, when there is not any work in the fields, Sisters and laity offer multi-educational classes in response to the residents' needs and desires.**



Inside the medical van, Phyllis Daney, RN, a long-time volunteer, offers diabetes testing and screening to a worker, while Sr. Theresa Linehan, SNDdeN, outside the RV, gives advice to a woman needing pastoral and health-care support.



Many activities have been organized, such as music, Spanish literacy, art, sewing, Chinese cooking classes, and healthcare education. For the children, the center offers education and classes in *Tae Kwon Do*. **Pastoral counseling, food and rent assistance, legal and social advocacy, and health support are always available.** An empowerment process for the people requires creativity from those participating in this ministry, as we respond to the services needed. All programs foster self-sufficiency and self-determination and therefore benefit individuals and the community.

The center emphasizes wellness in mind, body and spirit, with specific emphasis on disease prevention and health promotion as part of the community health outreach. In 2000, a donated RV made it possible to service the farm workers by bringing diabetes education and health screenings directly into the agricultural fields. The high propensity of diabetes in the Hispanic community and the lack of healthcare access propelled us into action. Today, this outreach program includes diabetes, blood pressure and cholesterol screening, with an emphasis on education. For those who need treatment and do not have a regular doctor, Sr. Theresa Linehan, Diabetes Nurse Practitioner, has become a companion and advisor for diabetes care. Even when involved in other ministries, such as leadership or retreat work, Sr. Theresa maintains

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communication with her patients through Skype on Tuesday evenings. She discusses her patients' progress, changes medications and continues to give them her time, care, and compassion in this day of technology!

Through the years, *Casa de la Cultura Center* has been successful due to many volunteers, assisting Sr. Rosa Dolores with many projects. Some volunteers include Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur from the California Province, Srs. Avelina

Garcia, Julie Marie Thorpe and Christina Marie Trudeau, as well as some Holy Name Sisters and Holy Family Sisters. The people trust and rely on the strong presence and ministry of these women religious.



Sr. Theresa Linehan, SNDdeN, Diabetes Nurse Practitioner, (on screen) communicates via Skype with a patient (on right) and Sr. Rosa Dolores Rodriguez, SNDdeN (middle).

Sisters Rosa Dolores and Theresa weave the philosophy of **Time, Care and Compassion** in all services, projects and activities. The center is a place where there is **always time**, where **care is expected** and **compassion is ever present**. The center has cooperative and collaborative working relationships with many local agencies, with a conscious intent to bring needed support and services to the residents of the blighted communities of Pajaro, Las Lomas and surrounding areas.



Supported from the beginnings by the Daughters of Charity, Sr. Rosa Dolores Rodriguez, foundress of *Casa de la Cultura Center*, educates for life, as an SNDdeN, by teaching immigrant peoples in the fields the Pajaro Valley.

"Our hope is that this type of program, serving those in need, will be replicated by willing hearts, especially by Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, with hearts wide as the world!"

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

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Support Our Mission

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.

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Sharing SNDdeN Spirituality through Technology

By Sisters Ann Byrne and Kim Dalgarn, SNDdeN



In Britain, Sr. Bernadette Leach, SNDdeN types a Glimpses reflection while Sr. Ann Byrne, SNDdeN oversees with delight a reflection sent for a feast day.

After a liturgy, in the Cathedral of Liverpool, Sr. Ann Byrne heard a voice saying, “*You are just the person I want.*” The voice came from the Province Moderator, Sr. Kathleen McGhee, inviting Sr. Ann to coordinate a new online project. The Congregational Leadership Team (CLT) of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN) were asking the British Province to initiate on the Web site a sharing of Gospel reflections on Sundays and feast days throughout the liturgical year. Sr. Ann agreed to launch this new project on Pentecost Sunday in 2006. The British Province gave a three-year commitment (2006-2009) to do weekly reflections for a wide audience on the international Web site (www.sndden.org). With personal letters, Sr. Ann invited Sisters in England and Scotland to participate in an online ministry of Spiritual Sharings.

Naming the Spiritual Reflections

Before organising and posting these reflections, Sr. Ann struggled to find a symbolic name for the site. Since Mary is our Notre Dame patroness, for whom St. Julie named our Congregation, both the words of Scripture and our SNDdeN Constitutions lingered in her mind:

“*Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.*” Luke 2:19
Launched on Pentecost, the name was *Glimpses of Good News*. Later the title, *Glimpses of God’s Goodness* reflected more clearly the charism.

Sixty-eight Sisters, one at age 91, responded joyfully by writing reflections. Other Sisters supported the project with prayer. In addition, some communities in England and Scotland contributed community reflections. As coordinator of *Glimpses* Sr. Ann marvelled at this ministry as a new and exciting opportunity for commitment to a wider mission by which Sisters of all ages communicate God’s goodness to people all over the world. For three years, the Sisters of the British Province carried forward successfully the Glimpses project as a corporate ministry.



International Glimpses of God’s Goodness

In the November 2009, this ministry of spiritual sharing became the responsibility of Communications in the Congregational Mission Office. With English as the primary language, now Sisters from countries speaking Flemish, French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish contribute Gospel reflections in these languages. In more than one language on some Sundays and feasts, all reflections are posted in English. The 110 Sisters of the Glimpses Team live in 14 different countries in Africa, Europe, Latin America, and North America, including 14 States in the USA. **These Sisters inspire worldwide readers and make known God’s goodness through Gospel reflections.** Amazing online Scripture sharings reach many schools, colleges, parishes, retreat centres, hospitals, clinics, etc. “*Like Mary whose name we bear, we are called to hear the word of God and keep it.*” Constitution 47

- See *Glimpses of God’s Goodness* on homepage: www.sndden.org

Good Works

Worldwide Mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

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.



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.



Africa

Democratic Republic of Congo
Congo
Brazzaville
Kenya

Nigeria

South Africa
South Sudan
Zimbabwe

Asia

Japan

Europe

Belgium
France
Italy
United Kingdom

Latin

America
Brazil
Nicaragua
Peru

North

America
Haiti
United States (29 states and the District of Columbia)

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