Dear Friends,

“Look! On the mountains, the feet of those who bring good tidings, who proclaim peace” (Nahum 1:15)

In this issue of GOOD WORKS, you will be reading about Sisters who “educate for life” in schools, through projects that bring people together in homes, parish centers, and in the natural settings of neighborhood farms.

In Maryland, Sister Joan Kelly broadens education to develop within her students a sense of responsibility for the “life of the planet.”

In Brazil, Sister Maria Sousa Arruda ministers with youth, who proudly call themselves, “Planters of Peace.”

Two Congolese Sisters, Virginie Makengo and Lucie Batuyangenese, spread good tidings in Thuin, Belgium, one of the oldest Notre Dame establishments for education.

Sister Obehi Ogbeide walks directly with orphaned and vulnerable children in Kroonstad, South Africa.

On December 10, 2008, the United Nations publicly recognized the humanitarian work that Sister Dorothy Stang had given for more than 35 years, selflessly laboring to secure human rights for the poor and landless people in many areas of Brazil.

Thank you, dear Friends, for your interest and involvement with the committed women in Notre Dame. Thank you for walking with and supporting these women. Thank you for the courage and conviction with which you spread good tidings and proclaim peace!

In God’s Goodness,

Teresita Weind, SNDdeN
Congregational Leader
When Sister Joan Kelly entered the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur at age 17 in Ilchester, Maryland, she never envisioned that she would someday be a school principal. In fact, she didn't think she even wanted to teach. Today she looks back upon a 50-year career as an educator that has included teaching assignments in Washington, D.C., New York, and Philadelphia. She has master's degrees in education and administration. For the past 23 years she has served as principal of St. Ursula School in Baltimore, where, since her arrival, the enrollment has gone from 370 to 700.

Over the past eight years, Sister Joan has added another dimension to her work: developing within her students, and the community at large, a sense of responsibility for the life of the planet. “The school has made one of its goals to care for the environment,” Sister Joan said. “One of our teachers, Kathy Bivons, has become a self taught environmentalist, and she has done a lot to make us more aware of ways to conserve. We don’t abuse the use of water, electricity or the ground around us. We recycle paper, cardboard, plastic and aluminum, and we never throw away anything electronic; we pile it in a bin and then have it picked up to be safely recycled.” The school also has an environmental club.

“The school has made one of its goals to care for the environment”
“I read about the Power of the Sun Project several years ago, and it touched me that people in Africa didn’t have clean water or the electricity to purify it,” said Sister Joan. “When we showed the students pictures of the Sun Project, they were stunned. They saw how people live with so little, so simply, and it has helped them to form a mindset, to understand that we’ve been given the gifts of the earth. I think that is a really important part of education.”

The commitment to raise awareness does not end with the students. The school reaches out to parents and the community through fundraising programs to support the Sun Project. When the parish and school board wanted to mark Sister Joan’s 20th anniversary at St. Ursula’s, they offered to send her on a trip. She said she would rather a donation be made to Power of the Sun Project. St. Ursula’s obliged with a $25,000 check.

As for the students, Sister Joan sees evidence every day that they are taking the green message to heart. “I see the kids put things like used tissues into the trash and paper into recycling. They’ve learned the difference.” And she is hopeful that it is a lesson they will take with them when they leave St. Ursula School. “We are forming habits for life,” she said. “I hope that we are teaching global awareness and fostering concern for the environment in a way that they will never forget.”

Sister Joan Kelly, principal at St. Ursula School in Baltimore, Maryland, and some of the school’s students
‘Planters of Peace’ Nurture Hope in Brazil

by Maria Sousa Arruda, SNDdeN and Rita Raboin, SNDdeN

We live on the periphery of the city of Breves, on the Island of Marajó in the State of Pará in Northern Brazil. The island has 16 counties and is the largest archipelago in the world, with a population of 360,000 people. Marajó is a 15-hour boat trip from the capital city, Belém. Breves, with more than 96,000 inhabitants, is the largest county in population.

Our neighborhood, Jardim Tropical, “Tropical Garden,” has approximately 1,000 families, including hundreds of children and teens. There is no school, health clinic, or even a street in various areas. Where streets do exist, they do not have asphalt, and there are few street lights. In flooded areas, slats of wood are thrown together to form makeshift bridges. Most houses do not have water spouts. Drugs, violence, unemployment, alcoholism, gangs, and lack of security characterize our neighborhood. Bars play pornographic music that demoralizes families and exploits women.

We and the youth with whom we work are providing an island of hope in Jardim Tropical. A group of 30 to 40 young people that I (Sister Maria) facilitate are active in a weekly youth group.

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These youth help prepare the liturgy and also participate in novenas, processions, preparation for baptism, a nutrition program for babies, and protest marches—all activities that energize our community. The youth named their group “Planters of Peace,” a significant choice in light of their neighborhood situation.

There is so much goodness in our young “Planters of Peace.” They are among the reasons why our neighborhood, poor as it is in some ways, deserves to be called “Tropical Garden.”

This youth group wants to evangelize by including the social dimension, and contributing toward the creation of a more just world. There are plans on the diocesan level to form Justice and Peace Commissions in all the parishes. We hope to provide ongoing formation that will enable group members to participate in these commissions. Bible formation is also a priority.

Another vital aspect of this work with our young people is the inclusion of youth who are repeatedly in trouble with the law because of drugs, alcohol, and violence. They have many personal problems, but we are blessed to have a psychologist who is willing to work free of charge with them.

There is so much goodness in our young “Planters of Peace.” They are among the reasons why our neighborhood, poor as it is in some ways, deserves to be called “Tropical Garden.”
Early Community and Young Branch of SNDs Collaborate in Belgium

By Sisters Marie-Rose Lepers and Alberte-Marie Collard

These guests provide their own cooking and other activities; the Sisters offer a ministry of listening, counsel, and shared prayer.

Françoise Blin de Bourdon, who with St. Julie founded the Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, began a community at Thuin with four Sisters. The Sisters ministered in a home for the elderly and a school that were part of the compound. The school continues today with a lay staff.

A children’s camp began at Pins Verts in Thuin in 1961. The large garden, a large house for the children's use, and a smaller house for the community of Sisters made the property ideal for this ministry. Periodic renovations and additions have made it possible for the Sisters of Notre Dame to continue to respond to the needs of local youth.

When the Belgian Sisters were no longer able to continue their ministry at Pins Verts, they appealed to the rest of the Congregation for help. Two Congolese Sisters visited Pins Verts to see whether Sisters from the Congo might be able to respond to the need.

Beginning in July 2007, Congolese Sisters have made possible an ongoing SND deN presence at this site whose history goes back to the earliest years of the Congregation.

Sisters Lucie and Virginie share community with Belgian Sister Alberte-Marie Collard, age 90, who cooks for the sisters and visits the sick in their homes. These three sisters radiate our mission statement that God is so very good and the reality that “we are called to be one”.

One of the oldest Notre Dame establishments, founded at Thuin, Belgium, still operates today with the help of two Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur from the Congo. Sisters Virginie Makengo and Lucie Batuyangenese make it possible for groups to continue to use the property for children's camps, formation weekends, retreats, environmental education, and family events.
HIV/AIDS: ‘An Enemy to Humanity’

By Sister Obehi Ogbeide, SND deN

Thabo is a 16-year-old orphan caring for his blind grandmother. An intelligent boy full of boyish pranks and enthusiasm, Thabo is the caretaker of their home.

The prevailing rate of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa is alarming. Many families are either infected or affected by this disease, which has left many children like Thabo orphaned or vulnerable due to the death of parent(s) or family members.

A response to this scenario is the Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Project. It was established in January 2008 in the Diocese of Kroonstad to cater and support children between ages 0 – 17 years. I am a Sister of Notre Dame from Nigeria serving as the coordinator of OVC in the Diocese of Kroonstad.

The children live in very poor townships and locations with little or no form of support. The project provides:

- nutritional support to the children through giving cooked meals at the different drop-in-centres on a weekday and weekend basis and food parcels to support their families;
- educational assistance through preventative and educational talks, helping with home and school work, providing learning materials, uniforms and school fees;
- psychosocial support through recreational activities and individual/group counselling for the children’s mental and emotional health;
- assistance with obtaining legal documents and birth certificates for those not yet eligible for state grants so that they can have access to such grants; and
- assistance with the development of healthy bonding between the children and their families.

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There are a number of volunteers from the various communities working with me and helping with outreach to the children. The project has grown immensely, with a network of 64 individuals caring for and supporting 1,040 orphans and vulnerable children at 22 centres. These centres cover the three regions of the diocese (north, central, and south).

The caregivers receive training in how to care for the children. They are helped to identify the children, assess their living conditions, and determine their areas of need. The project has made a huge impact in the lives of these children and their families. Augustina Kwala is one such person who is passionate about helping HIV positive children take their antiretroviral medication without interruption and focuses on home-based care for very ill children.

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Sister Dorothy became a symbol of the fight to preserve the rainforest and to protect the rights of the most vulnerable groups. After receiving several death threats for her work in Brazil, she commented, “I don’t want to flee, nor do I want to abandon the battle of these farmers who live without any protection in the forest. They have the sacrosanct right to aspire to a better life on land where they can live and work with dignity while respecting the environment.”
Our Mission

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur making known God's goodness... educating for life.

Sisters of Notre Dame, 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
Zimbabwe

Asia
Japan

Europe
Belgium
France
Italy
United Kingdom

Latin America
Brazil
Mexico
Nicaragua
Peru

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