Jubilee Joy:
50 Years in Brazil
1962 - 2012
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"Abide in my LOVE... that my JOY may be in you...."
John 15: 9, 11
My dear friends of Notre Dame,

What plays out in your imagination when you link humanity with these words: edge, fringe, margin, and periphery?

Do your know people who are making conscious choices to live on any one or more of the four outer boundaries of humanity? In the global south and north where our Sisters of Notre Dame serve, the societal conditions in many countries reveal that more and more people have been pushed to the periphery as a result of natural disaster, economic and/or post-traumatic stress, erosion of both family and community structures, oppression, violence and war. Circumstances have provoked their need to live on the “edges of humanity.”

In the stories in this issue of Good Works, you will read: “we go where the needs of people and the Church call us; each day we try to do what God asks of us, living fully in the present moment; and we minister to people struggling to stay where their ancestors lived for years.”

It is the Sisters’ presence and commitment that nurtures lasting joy in the hearts of those with whom they minister, in giving and receiving.

Thank you for participating through your presence of prayer, support and donations. Every form of presence strengthens the promise of Jesus: “Abide in my LOVE...that my JOY may be in you.” (John 15:9, 11)

The joy Jesus promised and the joy emanating from our mission is a lasting joy, made visible and tangible in faces of love, hands and hearts of service, and works of mercy and peace.

Thank you for your partnership in the joy of the Risen Christ that cannot be snatched from the many who live on the fringe and periphery of humanity.

In God’s Goodness,

Teresita Weind, SNDdeN
Sister Teresita Weind, SNDdeN Congregational Leader

Front Cover:
The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur celebrate 50 years in Brazil. Sisters Jo Anne Depweg (top right), Maria Fatima Borges da Costa (top left), Maria Tecla da Silva Gaia (front left) and Maria Socorro Oliveira da Silva (background) rejoice with a lay friend in their shared Mission of making known God’s goodness in Latin America.

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Jubilee Joy: 50 Years in Brazil

We are celebrating 50 years of our presence and ministry among the Brazilian people. The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur have been a vibrant religious community, bringing the Gospel message and the spirit of St. Julie Billiart to Brazil since 1962. The pastor in Rosário, Maranhão, a small city in the interior, had requested women religious to staff a school in his parish. So SND leaders responded, as Julie did, to go where the needs of people and the Church were calling them.

On a snowy October day in 1962, five SNDs waved good-bye from the ship’s deck to those who came to see them off from New York to the first Notre Dame foundation in Latin America. Representing California, Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts and Ohio provinces, three SND North American provincials sent off in mission to Brazil the first community: Sisters Gertrude Barron, Therese Drummond, Kathleen Early, Marlene de Nardo, and Jo Anne Depweg. Imbued with Gospel values and Vatican II perspectives, these Sisters faced struggles against injustice in their ministries among the people and they chose a strong option for impoverished people. They prepared the soil for potential Brazilian SNDs and others who would be called to participate in the Mission in Brazil.

Today, we, American and Brazilian Sisters work side by side with the laity in the north and northeast of Brazil, in accompanying people living in poverty. Every day, we help adults, adolescents and children to become conscious of their dignity, particularly through Bible study and popular education.

Sisters Respond to Needs

On Marajó Island, Pará, Sr. Rita Raboin works with the diocesan Justice and Peace Commission, the Land Pastoral and in community organizing. Sr. Maria Sousa Arruda is a teacher in the public system and shares with Sr. Rita in community organizing, in seeking solutions to the inadequate water supply. Due to a precarious system of water delivery and waste control, Marajó’s unhealthy water supply has become a critical issue. Sr. Maria Socorro de Oliveira, returning from English study in Ohio, USA, will soon begin a new ministry among the people in Breves.

In Belém, Sisters Maria Fátima Borges da Costa and Maria Josineide da Silva are students at the University. They give service in the neighborhood where our local community visits families, gives educational lessons for reinforcement and enables group activities with the children. Zenilda, our novice, tutors children with learning difficulties and teaches catechesis. Sr. Maria Tecla Gaia, returning from English study...
in the USA, has just begun ministry in visiting the neighborhood and helping in a Day Care Center. Sr. Rebeca Spires, serves with several indigenous tribes of Indians. One village chief invited her “to teach the children catechism and writing in their own language.” She works with the Indigenous Pastoral, among the peoples of Marabá, Pará and Oiapóque, Amapá. Sr. Jo Anne Depweg is a presence both in the province house and in the neighborhood in Belém. She serves on the Sr. Dorothy Stang Committee by working for Human Rights in the justice system.

**In Anapu.** Sisters Jane Dwyer and Katy Webster are a vibrant presence. They accompany people who are struggling to stay in the settlements and build a secure, joyful, and productive life on the land. Sr. Raminha Severina Ramos Nascimento, the first Brazilian SND, offers Bible study and catechesis to adults. With a lay catechist, she teaches religious studies to three age groups of children. Pilgrims pray, celebrate and honor Sr. Dorothy’s life and martyrdom in the Forest at Anapu. The local people gather for meetings, courses, celebrative events, and for recreation at St. Raphael Center in this location. While defending the rights of families against wealthy land owners, Sr. Dorothy was murdered in Anapu by hired killers in February 2005. The Sisters also welcome pilgrims arriving at this site where Sr. Dorothy was killed.

**In São Luís, Maranhão.** Sr. Sandra Araújo dos Santos ministers with Justice on the Tracks, a group promoting the rights of the people who live along the railroad tracks of the Vale do Rio Doce, an international and powerful company that mines and exports iron ore. She also works with the Land Pastoral. Having just completed her law degree, Sr. Sandra gives legal counsel. Sr. Ani Caroline Wihbey promotes good health, through education in popular, alternative, and preventive health care. She ministers to descendents of slaves, still living in areas where their ancestors have lived for years. They struggle to stay, while large companies try to confiscate their traditional lands. Sisters Maria Vagner and Maria de Jesus Borges da Costa serve also among the people in the traditional communities. Sr. Maria Vagner is currently studying agriculture.

**In Ceará.** Sr. Betsy Flynn is an active presence in Fortaleza and in a neighborhood that is threatened with demolition because of the building projects for the World Cup! Sr. Mary Alice McCabe works in Itapiopoca and Maceió with the coast communities, in defending their lives against big business, such as the tourist industry. She helps to keep the beaches free for the people who have been fisher people all their lives. With Sr. Mary Alice, Sr. Luciane Diniz ministers in a coastal settlement by serving in a library and working with young people.

**Our entire Brazil Unit rejoices in this significant anniversary.** By our lives in community and ministry, we bring the “good news” and proclaim the goodness of God. With those participating in our Mission, we work continuously to defend human rights and the dignity of each person. With the people, we are challenged to live in harmony and protect the environment. We are engaged with our people in praying, studying and living the Scriptures, promoting community organizing, and educating for life in every moment and in every place. We celebrate the strong faith of the Brazilian people which helps them to survive today.

**We repeat often with those joining us in our Mission: Our God is so good to us. Como o bom Deus é bom.**
In 1931, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur opened a nursery school for children in an impoverished section in Rome, called Torpignattara, along the Via Casilina. Later the Sisters added an elementary school. Today, three schools continue to “educate for life” children of many cultures who live in this part of Rome. In the Nursery School (Scuola Materna), Sr. Luciana Maria Apollonio works with lay staff in teaching and caring for little children. In the Elementary School (Scuola Primaria), Sisters Anna Bernardetta Marfoli and Ester Maria Santucci, with co-workers, teach Italian, mathematics, history, music, geography, science and religion. Sr. Maria Lucia Capoccia teaches art. In the Day Care Center (Asilo Nido), working mothers find special care for their babies. Two SNDs, Sisters Maria Rosaria Fiorilli and Maria Gabriella Fiorucci give support through prayer and service to our community.

As Sisters of Notre Dame, we live simple and ordinary lives. Each day, we try to do what God asks of us, living fully in the present moment, open to him and to those whom he allows us to meet. Our ordinary ministry becomes extraordinary in educating children and adults, as the needs appear. In these past decades, the population has changed radically in Italy. Refugees and immigrants from many parts of our suffering world seek homes in our diverse Roman society. Passing the train station, we cannot miss the growing number of homeless refugees who live in their vehicles, surrounding the station parking lot. In recent years, we have invited into our schools many children who are not Italian and we find ways to reach out to their current needs.

Solving a Need for Mothers

About a year ago, while talking to one of the mothers who unfortunately did not understand Italian, Sr. Anna Bernardetta tried to communicate that her son, Marco, was not studying. His behavior in school at times was unacceptable. Marco had to translate the Italian for his mother, since Sr. Anna was obviously unable to express herself in the Egyptian language. While speaking to his mother, Sister noticed that the woman was smiling happily. Then, she realized that Marco was translating the exact opposite of what she was explaining to his mother about his conduct! Then, the idea came to Sr. Anna to invite all non-Italian mothers to come for Italian lessons on one afternoon each week. They joyfully accepted her invitation for language lessons.
and a strong Italian course evolved. Now at parent consultations, mothers understand well teachers’ comments about the progress and conduct of their children. The Sisters continue these Italian lessons each year.

Many families of our children belong to St. Julie Billiart Parish. In December 1981, this parish named for our foundress, Santa Giulia, opened its doors to Catholics in the area. When the parish community worshiped in a storefront chapel, the Sisters, along with lay volunteers, taught religious classes. Sr. Elizabeth Gauthier, a Belgian, did pastoral ministry with families and taught religious education in the parish. Sr. Maria Lucia Capoccia brought communion to the sick in their homes. Currently, we SNDs worship with St. Julie’s Parish community at liturgies and support parish activities by our presence. Our ministry in the schools is our primary responsibility and limits our teaching role in the parish. We treasure our participation in worshipping with our parish community.

Pioneers of the Italian Mission

The pioneers of the Italian ND Mission were an international community from Europe and the USA. Sr. Mathilde Bertrand from Belgium, Sisters Anthony Antoniazzi and Winifred Harris from Britain formed the first community in Rome in January 1931. Later Sr. Anna de Ste Thérèse from Belgium replaced Sr. Winifred. The new community expanded when Sisters Gerard of St. Joseph Killoran from Britain, Imelda de la Passion Naets from Belgium, Ann Ignatia McCormick and Catherine Aloyse O’Donnell from the USA arrived to staff the schools in Torpignattara. Attracted by the Sisters in these early years, young Italian women began entering Notre Dame. They were formed in the Novitiate in Namur, Belgium until the Novitiate opened in Rome in 1933.

Throughout these 81 years, many American, Belgian and British Sisters have served in the Italian Unit. Some Sisters became Italian citizens to qualify for teaching in the schools. Returning home in the 1980s and holding her passport as an Italian citizen, Sr. Catherine Aloyse O’Donnell, a native of Cambridge, MA, met great difficulty at passport control in entering the USA in Boston. With the efforts of Senator Edward Kennedy, Sr. Catherine was able to return to the country as an American.

Stories of courage and sacrifice accompany the history of our Italian Unit. Throughout World War II, Italian and non-Italian SNDs served in Italy. When the German soldiers occupied Rome, the Sisters gave food, clothing and shelter, in harboring many Jewish people during the Nazi Regime. They often told stories about frequent searches by German soldiers, and the back-yard cow which provided much needed milk during wartime. The horror of the bombings, which devastated the convent and property, haunted the memories of Sisters who lived in Rome during those years. Sr. Therese Marguerite Murdoch related the history of their struggles in her monograph, entitled In His Service: The Roman Mission of Notre Dame 1931-1946.

Today, we are Italian SNDs, giving a joyful commitment in our community life and ministry in Rome. We educate for life another generation of children and displaced peoples in this century. Quant’e buono il Signor!
St. Julie Billiart, Educator and Mentor in Our Schools

By Marie Felten, General Archivist for the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

After the 1789 French Revolution, Julie Billiart bequeathed a legacy for the organization of her educational institutions. Responding to a need in her time, she created free schools for young girls living in poverty. She made herself responsible to visit them and to stir up the apostolic spirit among the young teachers. Today, the Notre Dame schools in Belgium wish to revisit the treasure willed to them by St. Julie and to work at educational systems based on her ideals.

In September 2011, twelve teaching religious congregations signed a charter creating the Association of French-speaking Congregational Schools (ASSOEC) in Belgium. This association aims at enriching dialogue and collaboration by creating and facilitating the synergies among congregational schools, that is, among educational communities whose practices get their inspiration from the creative intuitions of foundresses and founders of religious congregations. In this association, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur are represented by Sr. Marie-Thérèse Béget who for 36 years was the head of the Lycée Sainte Julie Billiart in Orvillers-Sorel, France.

Heads of Notre Dame Schools Gather in Namur

On April 19, 2012, the directors of the schools and the presidents of the Governing Boards from twelve Notre Dame schools met at the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. Some of these schools have merged and no longer have the name of Institutes of Notre Dame. The General Archivist opened the meeting with a talk on the History of the Congregation and St. Julie’s educational tradition. Then, participants had the opportunity to re-appropriate St. Julie’s charism and to discover current interest in her pedagogical ideas. Using the Letters of St. Julie and other documents written to the Sisters, Sr. Marie-Thérèse Béget drew twelve educational principles for insuring that Notre Dame schools are workshops for life. She described Julie’s view of a strong education as:

- grounded in the love of children
- a real apprenticeship for life
- based on respect not mere order
- rewarding the students
- combining serious work with suitable rest
- counseling the educator to correct faults
- avoiding group punishment

She noted that Julie built a system of education based definitively on these strong educational principles and relied with confidence on her good God for help. Then, Sr. Marie-Thérèse invited the directors and governing presidents to research in Julie letters some educational principles for their schools and their teams, as she herself had done for the professional school in Orvillers-Sorel.

“Each foundress or founder has left her/his own spiritual imprint on schools. Today, congregational schools strive to remain faithful to that spirit in their educational service.”


Continued
Heritage Schools

Mr. Fraipont, Governing President of the school in Saint-Hubert, founded by St. Julie in 1809, facilitated the meeting. Skilled by his experience in this school where the SNDs are still present, Mr. Fraipont emphasized the current interest in the educational principles of our foundress. He invited the directors and governing presidents to be engaged in the process by reflecting in groups and exchanging their ideas on the spiritual imprint of St. Julie on their schools. The conversations were lively and punctuated with similar stories about Notre Dame influence in the schools.

Networking to Continue

The meeting ended with the creation of a committee for networking the schools faithful to the educational principles of St. Julie Billiart. Some projects have been set in motion, such as the sharing of tools for animation and formation, participation in events commemorating St. Julie, stronger ties with the SNDs and exchanges in communications with Notre Dame schools, elsewhere in the world. The directors left Namur enthusiastically, with their copies of St. Julie’s Letters.

Participants showed an excitement and enthusiastic commitment in returning to the founding message and principles of St. Julie in the Notre Dame schools.

During the break-time, Sr. Paul-Viviane Robette discusses with Madame Kinif, Directress of the Notre Dame school in Namur, some possible ramifications of implementing St. Julie’s educational principles.

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

Invite You to

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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My life has been gifted and enriched by an invitation to participate in the lives of those in need. How many times do we receive such an invitation from those with whom we work? This phenomenon happened to us, Sr. Barbara Wheeler, O.P. and myself, as we were working in a food pantry in the inner city of Cincinnati, Ohio. Often people without jobs came to get food. A group of women in the West End community of Cincinnati wanted to be more independent of welfare assistance. These women were determined to make a better life and see that their children stayed in school. We asked what we could do to help those living in difficult situations. From their suggestions, we started projects in sewing, silk screening, cooking, exterminating, light carpentry and piece work. With this outreach, we needed more help. We began to invite friends, families and volunteers to come to our rescue and to join Sr. Barbara and me with these projects. This became the grassroots beginning for helping unemployed persons.

**Story of Early Days**

I especially remember one project: making 3000 tote bags in a one month period. Someone gave us some remnant material. One day, Esther cut one hundred bags. No one really had any sewing skills. The machines were inadequate. So, Esther bundled the bags in piles of thirty and asked individuals entering our building to take a pack and sew them for us. Eventually, we bought a few newer machines and in time we got better at sewing. Our helpers in the building brought us the finished bags. Suzanne, a graphic artist, taught us to silk screen the bags; we set the paint by ironing them. When finished, we received scholarships to attend a woman’s convention, at which every woman carried one of our bags.

In the beginning, we were always searching for different ways to create employment for people. Some individuals working with us had great cooking skills. Many not-for-profit groups in the area wanted catered lunches and they asked us to make the food. In 1990, when a pizza restaurant became available, we were able to get it for the cost of the back rent. Therefore, we opened a restaurant, Venice on Vine, and a new corporation, called **Power Inspires Progress** (PIP). This became our own source for offering jobs and teaching basic education, life skills, work ethics and personal responsibility.

**Power Inspires Progress for Trainees**

PIP provides employment education and on-the-job work readiness training for adults. Trainees gain knowledge and experience to be successful in the workforce. The values we stress are education, community, diversity and collaboration. Seeking employment, our participants often hurdle such barriers as low educational achievement, lack of education/diplomas, criminal history, mental health and addiction issues. Almost all lack experience with employer expectations. In a community divested of employment opportunities, we operate two small businesses, a pizza parlor and catering, as training sites. In a structured yet supportive environment with real needs and high-expectations, trainees build a work history, job skills and educational goals. We provide a workplace community where people are able to break out of the cycle of poverty by improving their lives and the lives of their children. Trainees experience a strong sense of community and a positive work environment; they discover enjoyment and pride in being productive in the workforce.

**Power Inspires Progress: Invitation and Participation**

Sister Judith Tensing, SNDdeN

Sr. Judith encourages a young woman to be creative in presenting the food.
Educating for Employment

Education is an every-day objective at PIP. Learning happens through direct experience and academic tutoring. In employment education, our trainees learn first by doing, and they learn by teaching. Skills in the restaurant and catering are mastered by shadowing, then executing alone, and then by being shadowed by someone else. Secondly, we include academic tutoring. Each trainee has an educational goal and works with tutors approximately 3 times a week on math, reading, computer skills, writing, and more. Third, we teach job search, helping each trainee prepare a resume, attend job fairs, participate in mock interviews and more. Fourth, we teach life skills through workshops, in-service meetings, and conferences with nurses and medical residents. We do budgeting programs, nutrition education, anti-stress workshops and more.

In 2008, we added a Lunch and Learn program which increased our focus on academic tutoring in the program. We see math, English, computers and the GED as major keys to successful employment. Tutoring complements the teamwork, problem solving, cooking, cleaning and cash management skills taught on the job. Sales in our restaurant and catering programs continue to increase.

Our training program is growing to serve people in a more structured way. Our educational and training ministry provides positive, meaningful job opportunities for adults working through employment barriers.

Hundreds of Cincinnatians have found work and a supportive community at Venice on Vine throughout the years, as trainees, volunteers, teachers, donors and more.

As a skilled teacher, Sr. Judith is able to tutor trainees for strengthening their educational backgrounds.
SN D deN  M ission

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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**ANNOUNCEMENT**

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur announce the launch of our redesigned international Web site. You will find the site in English, in French and in a mobile site, to meet the demands of new technologies at [www.sndden.org](http://www.sndden.org).