Japanese Sisters Contribute to Peace

See article page 4

“Blessed are the peacemakers…”
Matthew 5:9
My dear friends of Notre Dame,
We thank St. John Chrysostom (347-407 AD) for prescribing a simple test of prayer and work: The test of the sincerity of one’s prayer is the willingness to work for that for which one prays. The test of the sincerity of one’s work is the willingness to pray for that for which one works.

St. John’s words confirm the thoughts and efforts of believers all over the world: action and practice are an intrinsic testimony of what we profess in words of faith and prayer. A second more recent and familiar quote from the World Synod of Bishops in Latin America stretch the test of preaching the Gospel: prayer and work, on behalf of justice and peace are essential.

“Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel.”

World Synod of Bishops in Latin America, Justice in the World, November 30, 1971

Sometimes prose and poetry help to express and ratify what otherwise might go unnoticed, namely who we are as Sisters of Notre Dame and what we have done and continue to do every day. Commitment to justice and peace is our Gospel proclamation of the goodness of God. You will read and see, in this issue of Good Works, illustrations of the effort to fuse prayer and action for justice and peace.

We pray and work with you in co-creating with the same Creator who looked upon the moon and stars, the birds of the air, animals on land and in sea waters, flowers and trees, and all living creatures, including us, and “saw that it was good.” (Genesis, Chapter 1)

In God’s Goodness,
Teresita Weind, SNDdeN
Sister Teresita Weind, SNDdeN Congregational Leader

Front Cover:
Sr. Johanna
Saiko Nakamura accompanied 10 high school students from Hiroshima to the Catholic Support Center in the Disaster Zone for assistance with the clean-up from the earthquake and tsunami.

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In Japan, the ministries of Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN) are now mostly in the Hiroshima Diocese. In 1981, during a visit to Hiroshima as a pilgrim, Pope John Paul II gave his impressive *Appeal for Peace* to the world. Collaborating with the Church in Japan, Sisters of Notre Dame are challenged to be peacemakers. With our co-workers, we are educating young people to be peacemakers. Although most of our students and staff are not Catholics or Christians, in all Notre Dame schools, we do have religious education classes, pray together, study the Gospel and the spirit of our foundress, St. Julie Billiart. Peace study is an essential part of religious education in our schools. We teach and encourage students to be peacemakers. In 1950, with the prayer for peace, Japanese and American Sisters opened Notre Dame Seishin Junior and Senior High School (NDSH) in Hiroshima. Today, this school has a six-year program of peace studies.

**Senbazuru ~ Symbol of Peace**

Students have opportunities to hear experiences of the atom bomb from graduates; Sr. Agnes Hirota, SNDdeN is among these witnesses. All students visit the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park “to remember Hiroshima.” Before their visit, they prayerfully make paper cranes. After sustaining serious injuries from the atom bomb, a girl named Sadako, as a prayer for her recovery, made 1,000 paper cranes (*Senbazuru*) before she died at age 12. Since then, other young people fulfill her desire and continue this practice with paper cranes which have become a symbol of peace. Every year, more than ten million Senbazuru are offered to the Peace Park. Students in our school join the *Recycling Project of Senbazuru* by creating mosaic arts with messages for peace and send them to Catholic Schools in Korea and the Philippines; to our Heritage Centre in Namur, Belgium as well as to a Junior High School in the Japan Disaster Zone.

**Challenge from the Disaster Zone**

On March 11, 2011, the Great Eastern Earthquake and tsunami devastated Japan with many deaths and heavy immediate and long-term economic and environmental damage. Official records list 15,882 deaths; 2,668 people are missing and 315,196 people are still taking refuge after two years. The tsunami caused destruction to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, and released wide-spread radioactivity that has become a severe health hazard. Even now, the 100,000 people, evacuated from this area, live in fear and anxiety. People worry about the effects of radiation on their children. After World War II, Japan chose *The Peace Constitution* and economic development instead of strong military power. The choice resulted from an earnest desire never to send Japanese children to the battle field nor allow the children ever to starve again. Eventually, the priority for this...
goal changed to profitability and efficiency, strengthened by the progression of Globalism. With these trends, national policies promote more nuclear power plants, even though scientists predict new disasters, due to other earthquakes or tsunamis. All 50 functioning nuclear reactors in Japan, with some on the active fault, are at risk for more horrific accidents. Without a more secure environment, the people doubt survival for the next generation.

SNDdeN Collaborate with the Church

As Catholics, we are only 0.3% of the whole population. Yet, in 16 dioceses in Japan, we are united and challenged to respond to the call from the Disaster Zone. The Sendai Diocese (three disaster prefectures) organized the Support Center for victims and formed 9 bases. All dioceses send volunteers and raise money for the Support Center. Caritas Japan supports the Center financially. All Catholics, including bishops, priests, religious and lay people are serving together and sharing resources. At first, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious Sisters sponsored a “Sisters’ Relay” to have Sisters from each Congregation join the volunteers for one week or more at the Support Center. During the second year, the women religious had a relay of prayer. Many Catholic schools collected donations and sent the students as volunteers. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan proclaimed: “Abolish Nuclear Plants Immediately.” Many dioceses encouraged parishes to study more about nuclear power. To help victims of natural and nuclear disasters and to change our own life styles are constant challenges. Sisters in Japan are responding to the call. Each community decided on concrete targets in daily life to save electricity and live more simply. We sent Sister Mitsuko Shoji to the Sendai Support Center as a runner of Sisters’ Relay for a month and other Sisters joined with her in prayer. Notre Dame schools also sent volunteers. Sister Johanna Saiko Nakamura joined with ten students last summer in efforts to remove the debris. These experiences help the students to think about their own lives now and in the future. Sisters in Higashi Hiroshima belong to a satellite Parish Church. At a gathering to understand more about the plight of the victims, a graduate of our school described her work mostly for children. The local welfare commissioner, responsible for taking care of the families from the Disaster Zone, shared her experiences. All attending the meeting, Christians, Buddhists and other denominations prayed the Rosary together. At the opening of the Year of Faith, the Bishops pointed out the current social situation in Japan. They asked Japanese Catholics to “share ideas with each other, and search for measures and expressions for New Evangelization with people inside and outside of the Church, while listening to the voices of suffering people.”

In 2014, SNDdeN will celebrate the 90th anniversary of our Mission in Japan. We hope to listen more to the voices of our people and collaborate with the Church as peacemakers.
Continuing Service to Immigrants

By Sister Sheila Palmer, SNDdeN

Notre Dame Learning Center (NDLC), in the heart of downtown Hartford, CT reaches out to adult learners who seek to improve English skills. Tucked neatly in a series of classrooms in a church building, near a theatre and convention center, NDLC welcomes students from many corners of our world, including Albania, Poland, Columbia, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, Togo and Vietnam. The Center is small in size, but it is large in a welcoming spirit and commitment to provide personalized and quality education in a warm, safe and loving atmosphere.

Sr. Sheila Palmer, Director of the Notre Dame Learning Center, assisted by other Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN), Sisters Joan Farley, Patricia Shanahan and Linette Doucette and by Sr. Jean Carroll, RSM constitute a faculty of strong educators, including Harry Robinson, Bea Cramer, Judy O’Brien and lay volunteers. Staff members have wide experience in education and some legal expertise as well. Their commitment to educating adults from many countries extends beyond the classroom. The staff at NDLC takes opportunities not only to teach English but also to help students with critical life issues.

Students learn in class sessions and individual tutoring, as teachers use the most effective methods to meet the individual needs of each student. In addition, students often approach the staff with questions about job applications, legal issues, etc. Some students seek advice and counsel regarding personal or immigration issues. The faculty commits itself to respond to the specific need at any given time.

Experience as an Immigrant and Educator

In Hartford, Sr. Sheila brings a wealth of personal and educational experience. She often recalls her challenges when she emigrated from Jamaica to the United States. As an adult, having a family in the USA, the support of her Sisters in community as well as an education with an advanced degree, she admits that “it was not always easy.”

Sr. Sheila Palmer oversees students’ work.

Sr. Sheila believes that it was in those early days in America that her passion for helping immigrant peoples was born. Today, she wonders how so many other immigrants, arriving in the USA without any contacts or resources, are able to deal with the pain of leaving loved ones and cope with the adjustments to be made in living in a new country.

At the Center, Sr. Sheila’s experience as an educator has been an invaluable asset. Having taught English in two Catholic high schools in Connecticut, in 1992, she joined the founding faculty of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur at Notre Dame Education Center (NDEC) in South Boston, MA. Convinced that education for adults in the immigrant community was a growing need, these Sisters ventured into an extended ministry of outreach, continuing over 20 years and into the future. Sr. Sheila served there for 12 years and then returned to Connecticut where she became a teacher and mentor in a social service agency. In 2008, she opened Notre Dame Learning Center in Hartford, on a site that had previously been a women’s center administered by our Sisters. Sr. Sheila realizes that this Center represents the continuing and unbroken commitment that the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur have shown to immigrant communities.

The Sisters at NDLC view their ministry as a continuing circle of service and a concrete response of our Notre Dame mission to those most in need. As times change, people come to the United States from various countries for different reasons, according to the specific circumstances at a given time. In every time, the need remains constant for immigrant peoples to be respected, welcomed and offered the chance to learn or improve in the language of a country, and to understand and navigate in a new culture. Notre Dame’s continuing circle of service to immigrants is closely aligned with the Mission of St. Julie Billiart who called her Sisters to reach out to those most in need. In everything that happens in this Hartford Center, the goal is to educate for life and reflect the God’s goodness to those who serve and are served in the multi-cultural city.

Building strong bonds with new peoples through education is a tangible way of strengthening efforts at the peace that comes through living Gospel imperatives.
**Education Matters for SNDdeN Community**

By Sister Evalyne Aseyo, SNDdeN

At Great Lakes University of Kisumu, an offshoot of the Tropical Institute of Community Health and Development (TICH), Sr. Evalyne Aseyo teaches and researches the needs of the most vulnerable communities in Kenya, Africa. This Institute identifies sites where households are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and ill health. In a partnership with the community, service providers and other training and research institutions, TICH complements the academic functions of the University, by establishing practical learning sites for academic programmes and for the improvement of health systems in over 20 districts. At a partnership site in Nyalenda, Kisumu County, Sr. Evalyne is a team leader, ministering directly in the department of Community Development and Health Promotion.

Sr. Evalyne works with the district health care system to build on the capabilities of people and communities in undertaking individual and collective actions to solve their own problems. She dialogues with members of households in implementing various programs for alleviating poverty and combating ill health. She teaches courses for building healthy, healing communities, mobilization of communities as well as community-based education and counselling. Through research, she engages learners at partnership sites to work with the community in monitoring the community, identifying gaps and looking for resource people to develop the capabilities of the people. Sr. Evalyne carries out household registration, conducts updates, validates and visits registered households at least once a month.

With other researchers, Sr. Evalyne discovers emerging trends and develops interventions projects/programmes for promoting health and development for communities. Using indicators like pre-natal care, births, nutrition for children under five years, insecticide, water treatment, and immunization, she captures helpful information for monitoring health outcomes to reduce the mortality rate. She gives close attention to pregnant women, maternal and child health, tracing malnutrition cases and recommending referrals for immunization of children, prevention of malaria, (the leading killer for children under five years in Kenya), for HIV/AIDS, water treatment, etc.

After action-based research, surveys and interventions, Sr. Evalyne analyses data in order to identify the emerging trends and assess the level of community strategies effecting the health care of the community. From these findings, she prepares policy briefs to inform concerned partners for taking appropriate action.

**Alternate Education for Street Children**

Sister Elizabeth Nikesa Sichangi ministers at Pandipieri Non-formal Education (PNFE), started in the 1990s, for community children whose parents/guardians are unable to provide them with some basic needs, especially education. These children, wandering on the streets of Kisumu town, look for food, either during the daytime or even during the night. PNFE offers a preventive measure for the needy children as a school and rehabilitation centre.

About 15 children and adolescents live at the centre and 20 come daily while living at home with parents/guardians. They range from ages 7 to 17. PNFE groups them into two levels – those who have been or not been to school and need to learn from the beginning. Sr. Evalyne knows that her ministry as teacher and researcher does reach families trapped in poverty and she offers them hope for another generation.

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school already. Sr. Elizabeth teaches the second level in this non-formal education programme consisting of various activities, such as classroom learning, indoor and outdoor games, going for nature walks, cleaning.

Sr. Elizabeth teaches English, Mathematics and Kiswahili. She admits that the challenges are many in teaching different ages, dealing with behavioral problems and offering some counselling. Yet, the children are often joyous. Although the children stay at the centre for only one year, this non-formal education program enables the parents/guardians to look for formal education for the children. Unfortunately some children return to the same environment without further schooling.

Preparation for Teaching

Sister Lucy Musembi is a second year undergraduate student in Education and English at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), Kisumu Campus. She recognizes this great opportunity for continuing her education in preparation for teaching in interacting with people from other parts of the country and continent. She belongs to the choir and participates in the University’s community service activities for reaching out to those in need. Sr. Lucy values her education in CUEA whose mission is to promote excellence in research, teaching and community in preparing leaders in the intellectual tradition of the Catholic Church. She looks to her future in teaching from St. Julie Billiart’s call to her Sisters: To educate for life.
21st Century Education

By Sister Kristin Hokanson, SNDdeN

In 2001, St. Julie’s quote, “In the schools teach whatever is necessary to equip the students for life,” inspired the creation, of a virtual school system that would unite the educational mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN) throughout the world. Sister Kristin Hokanson, who founded the Notre Dame Virtual School (NDVS), envisions this ministry as necessary and relevant for education in our modern world. She says: “If St. Julie were alive today, she would carry an iPad and would communicate with the Notre Dame schools through the Internet.”

Today, the Notre Dame Virtual School provides global networking, online courses and projects, Web 2.0 resources, access to organizational memberships, and resources on an educational Web site, Notre Dame Online (NDO).

Gateway to Virtual School
The vision for Notre Dame Online began in 2005 when it was evident that the Internet and the resources available through NDVS were going to become increasingly important tools for education in this century. Sisters Kristin and Karen Hokanson thought it would be a good investment to purchase the domain name NotreDameOnline.org. They envisioned NDO as a “gateway” webpage to NDVS and other online initiatives of the SNDdeN and their schools.

When the Notre Dame Educators met in July 2006 at the Networking for Mission Conference in Kentucky, the vision for an educational website was shared and received strong support. Since then, a group of educators and consultants has worked together to create NotreDameOnline.org. With the help of Notre Dame colleagues and the expertise of Alex Savage from Notre Dame High School, Norwich, England, a host server was secured and the first drafts for Notre Dame Online were circulated to the schools. After the initial development of NDO, web management was then done through the Congregational Mission Office, led by Sr. Margaret Mulholland, Education Liaison, with the assistance of Sr. Kim Dalgarn.

Today Notre Dame Online provides Notre Dame educators with links to many online resources and connections to Social Media applications including Twitter, Facebook, and Twitter. Students at Notre Dame High School in Sheffield, England share a NDVS environmental project with Sr. Margaret Shutt, SNDdeN.

Through Notre Dame Virtual School, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur bring the world and the 21st century into the classrooms at Our Lady Primary School in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Continued...
FaceBook, and YouTube. The site is a media center where educators and students post contributions.

A collaborative component of NDO is the involvement of the Notre Dame schools in Britain. Every year, the Notre Dame Virtual School develops a monthly theme calendar. Each Notre Dame School in the United Kingdom chooses a month to post online resources for use by other schools. Schools share lessons, assembly programs, pictures, and other resources to all who access the site.

**Redesign of Web site**

Through the support of the Congregational Leadership Team, Notre Dame Online has been redesigned to make it easier for those who access the site and those who contribute to this interactive media center.

Please visit the newly redesigned Notre Dame Online at:

**www.notredameonline.org**

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Website: **www.sndden.org**
Sisters Pastoring in the Church in Belgium

By Sisters Godelieve Martens and Joanna Vermeulen, SNDdeN

Parosol

Since retiring from teaching, Sr. Godelieve Martens, has served in Our Lady Mediatrix of Grace Parish, in Antwerp, Belgium. In the absence of a priest, she assists at funerals and conducts communion services when there is not any Mass. Most of the time, Sr. Godelieve gives service with Parosol, which represents Parochiale Solidariteit in Flemish. This group of concerned people, aim at promoting solidarity or unity within the parish and reach out to “people in need,” experiencing problems, impossible to be resolved alone. She keeps eyes and ears open to the needs of parishioners or those living nearby within the geographical frame of the parish, even non-churchgoers. One person may want something simple like borrowing a ladder, or another may need someone to do necessary shopping. Parosol supplies small items but passes larger material needs on to more specialized organizations. These volunteers initiate phone calls, send birthday cards, and deliver flowers personally at Easter or Christmas.

In visiting the same person often, Sr. Godelieve and volunteers build trust and deepen relationships. After funerals, Sr. Godelieve visits the family of deceased persons. This works wonders for grieving individuals. She says: “In our modern world, so few people have time for others, but Parosol volunteers do their best with care, respect, love, and courage to keep reaching out in a Christian way.” At a parish celebration, Sr. Godelieve received a testimonial from Bishop Johan Bonny, expressing praise and gratitude for her commitment to the parish and the Church. Serving in this ministry for over 25 years, Sr. Godelieve attests that trust in God grows slowly, and brings peace to many individuals.

Caring for the Whole Person

Sr. Joanna Vermeulen is a pastoral minister in Antwerp, Belgium at the Cantershof in Hove Residential and Care Centre. Her previous experience in Brazil encompassed 15 years of pastoral care. In 2002, Bishop Vandenberghe appointed her to this ministry and reappointed her in 2007. This year, the new Bishop of Antwerp, Johan Bonny and also the Casterthof’s administrator asked Sr. Joanna to continue her service. Ministry in this nursing home involves reaching out to 105 patients, 32 of whom suffer from light to severe dementia. Also, Sr. Joanna offers pastoral care to residents in 20 service flats. Often people ask her: “How are you able to provide pastoral care to old people and dementia sufferers?” She responds: “It is a gift.” For Sr. Joanna, pastoral care means showing love for the whole person, old or young, caring for spiritual needs and human necessities requiring attention. Responsible for liturgical celebrations, Sr. Joanna finds priests for Sundays and feast days.

A priest, a former headmaster at our Notre Dame School at Berchem, now celebrates Mass and administers the Sacraments. In the absence of priests, she leads liturgical services and prays the Stations of the Cross on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Annually, she organizes a penance service and an anointing of the sick. She prepares posters for feasts to remind the community of ways to share brotherly/sisterly charity.

Sr. Joanna describes a graced moment on Ash Wednesday, when she led a blessing with ash crosses on the foreheads of those attending. With her ashes, Sr. Joanna went to visit the dementia sufferers. A speechless man bent over her, and spoke: “Where did you get that ash cross?” Health care staff were amazed in hearing this man speak for the first time. Sr. Joanna promised him ashes and the patient became calm and showed visible happiness in receiving his cross of ashes.

Human Face

Being there, caring and showing concern for other human beings, day-to-day, are essential for complete pastoral ministry. Taking part in excursions, joining parties, visiting people in their rooms or communal areas mean so much to the residents. Sr. Joanna tries to know each person’s life story at an early stage in their care. Then, during time for terminal care, she is able to show great respect for wishes of the dying person and to relate well with family. She realizes the stress and emotions in this experience for the person and family; she gives spiritual counsel to assist them in coping. Suffering from Parkinson’s disease since 1993, Sr. Joanna now participates in a less energetic way. Yet she continues to hope and serve, believing that she brings some small joy to the lives of lonely elderly people and dementia sufferers. She responds to the call of the Gospel with joy in bringing peace and happiness to vulnerable individuals.
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.

SNDdeN Mission

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Democratic Republic of Congo
Congo Brazzaville
Kenya
Nigeria
South Africa
South Sudan
Zimbabwe

Europe
Belgium
France
Italy
United Kingdom

Latin America
Brazil
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(27 states and the District of Columbia)

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