Making All Things New  ~ See article page 4

“I will give them a new heart and...a new spirit.” EZ 11:19
My dear friends of Notre Dame,

This issue of Good Works is another illustration of what happens when committed and dedicated Sisters of Notre Dame focus attention and energy on creative and different answers to current situations in our world.

Anthony Robbins, a professional strategist wrote, “If you continue to do as you always have done, you will continue to get what you have always got.”

Albert Einstein said, “We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.”

As you read the stories about our worldwide mission, you will notice that, where needed, Sisters of Notre Dame have continued the fundamental elements of education to get what we know is good for others. In other situations, we dare to build on and stretch the elements of education in pursuit of life-sustaining and community-building bonds and relationships. In most places where we minister, we have inherited and are working to correct problems created by the thinking and doing of those who were there before we arrived. In other places we found unplowed fields where we could sow new seeds of our ministry.

With enthusiasm, collaboration, gusto and vision, the few sisters at St. Peter Claver School in Kroonstad inspire the Staff to teach with a “new heart and new spirit.” You will read about a new concept of education in Nicaragua, and the community service projects that are integral to comprehensive education at our Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont, CA. As you read, imbibe the joy of the people in Congo whose lives are influenced by the growth of the Photovoltaic Project.

With all of this growth before us, and the special celebration of a link with the recently canonized Saint Mary MacKillop, I thank you, dear friends, for your interest and investment in and your loving support of our worldwide mission.

With gratitude and appreciation,

Sister Teresita Weind, SNDdeN
Congregational Leader
Great excitement pervaded the official opening of the new high-school building at St. Peter Claver School in Maokeng township, outside Kroonstad in South Africa! What an amazing example of Notre Dame’s commitment to ‘making all things new!’ The new building, named after its last SND principal, Sr. Dorothy Castles, from the Ipswich Province (MA) and now deceased, was officially blessed by Bishop Jan De Groef and opened on 21 January 2011.

This school was established by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in 1916. In 1971, the local municipal authority moved it from its original site to the outskirts of the growing Maokeng township. The British Province of SNDs raised money for 27 precast classrooms to be built on the new site. The clay soil on which the new school was to be situated and the amount of funding available in 1971 precluded the construction of a permanent brick structure. Nine of the precast classrooms, with an original life span of 25 years, were replaced in the ‘90s with permanently structured classrooms that complied with the size laid down by the post-Apartheid Education Department. This Department pays an annual per capita subsidy of approximately $600 for each of the 900+ learners in the school, if the classrooms are the required size. In 2010, six more classrooms were built at a cost of $500,000.00, with foundations appropriate to the clay soil. Generous contributions from donors to our SND Mission Support have assisted with this development.

Great excitement pervaded those who attended the formal blessing. The learners now housed in this new Dorothy Castles Block were bursting with pride and joy. They had made up a song for the occasion, with the assistance of Notre Dame postulant, Cecilia Nguyen, who is teaching the students life skills. Some 600 learners, parents and invited guests attended the celebration. A group of mothers had spent the morning of the opening day in the mobile kitchen, housed in a container on the school property, in preparing food for about a thousand people. This kitchen is used every day during the school term for the preparation of meals for the 200 orphans and vulnerable children at the school. Without meals, these children would be unable to participate in the education process. The well-equipped kitchen was a donation from a local firm; the food for the children comes as another donation.

Great excitement pervaded the wider community. Another significant development in the school’s life this year is the opening of a Further Education and Training Section which will enable the learners to move from Grade 9 into the final three grades of formal schooling. St. Peter’s High is the culmination of the ‘dream’ of many parents. They have
Continuity of SND Presence in Education

The Sisters of Notre Dame have had a continuous presence to the people of Kroonstad and its surroundings since 1907. The history of 104 years of service is recorded in the archives. Currently there are two ND communities, one close to the school in Maokeng, and one in the town itself. Sr. Chantal Kisimbila, a Congolese SND, has worked in the school for the past 15 years. She oversees the finances of the school and offers pastoral care to learners in need. Currently, some 200 learners are victims in some way of the AIDS pandemic and need more care and support than the school programme provides. Sr. Gertrude Izuchukwu, an SND missionary from Nigeria, has been on the school staff for almost 18 months and is responsible for the Religious Education programme in the school. An ND postulant, Cecila Nguyen is having her formation ministry experience as a staff member of the school in 2011.

SNDs have as big a challenge in working among the educators as among the learners. The Sisters make their commitment with the belief that they continue to have an influence on the future citizens of this country.

“\textit{I will give them a new heart and...a new spirit.}” \textit{EZ 11:19}

Service to Wider Community

Utilising part of this building for a Further Education and Training Section of the High School offers many opportunities for much needed services to members of the local community. After 2013, when the first matriculants will have completed their final examinations, we will be able to apply for registration as an Adult Basic Education and Training Centre. We are fund-raising to open the library for the school which will also be available to members of the wider community, as will the computer centre and the well-equipped NFSI kitchen. In the words of the Chairperson of the NFSI Board, “St. Peter Claver High will be the NFSI’s anchor tenant.”

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On October 17, 2010, the Church recognized the saintliness of Mary MacKillop (1842-1909) at a Mass for her Canonization at St. Peter Basilica in Rome. With a diocesan priest, Fr. Julian Woods, Sr. Mary of the Cross founded the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart in Australia in 1867. Born in Fitzroy-Melbourne, Australia, Mary was the first of eight children. Her parents had emigrated from Scotland – Alexander in 1838 and Flora MacDonald in 1840. Her heritage in Scottish roots and her visits to our schools connect her with the Sisters of Notre Dame. While waiting (1873-1874) for approval of her Congregation’s Constitutions, Sr. Mary visited ND schools in Liverpool, England.

SND Connection with a New Saint

By Ishbel MacPherson, SNDdeN

While the joyous celebrations surrounding the Canonisation of St. Mary of the Cross are still fresh in our minds, I recognize another connection in the new saint’s life. Mary MacKillop’s mother, Flora MacDonald was born in Fort William, Scotland and lived in Lochaber until she emigrated to Australia at age 22. She came from a highly respected Catholic Lochaber family, the MacDonalds of Cranachan, Roy Bridge. Flora was related to Long John MacDonald who founded the Ben Nevis Distillery. Her birthplace was the Ben Nevis Inn in Fort William where her father was the proprietor.

Long John’s son, Donald Peter lived in Invernevis House in Fort William. The house became in 1926 the convent of the Daughters of Charity who passed it on to the Sisters of Notre Dame. In Scotland, she went to Invernevis House. Little did she know then that her cousin’s house would be a Notre Dame convent in the future! In years following her visit to Lochaber, Mary could see the family resemblances in so many of the people she had met. Some of her relatives would follow her into religious life, several as Sisters of Notre Dame. From the British Province, besides myself, Sisters Frances Connochie and Mary Frances MacDonald claim kinship with Mary.

The mission of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart is similar to Notre Dame’s mission. St. Mary of the Cross’ charism and her experiences in founding a religious congregation are echoes of St. Julie Billiart. In the early 19th century, Julie wanted her Sisters to reach out to “the poor of the most abandoned places” and she was adamant that her Congregation would not be restricted to one country. In her endeavours to have central government, St. Julie was not popular with the local bishop who wanted to take over the inheritance of our co-foundress, Françoise Blin de Bourdon. Julie was too shrewd for that. Inexperienced Sisters being given authority was another problem she faced. Throughout Julie’s life, her constant refrain was: “God is good.” She recognized also that her Congregation was founded on the Cross.

Mary MacKillop’s charism was similar: she saw the need to bring education to poor towns and rural areas. Again like Julie, she had to struggle for central government for her new Congregation. She wrote that the Institute was not “for Bathurst alone or for Adelaide or for Queensland alone; it is for the poor of all Australia.” She added that the “Sisters must be trained spiritually and in worldly knowledge necessary to enable them to take the stand the Church in Australia requires of them.” She also found authority was being given to Sisters unprepared for it. In money matters, she had to challenge a bishop asking for £100 he considered owed to him; the Sisters had actually given it to him for apostolic work.

In a recent publication, the author states: “Our good God was by far the most common title Mary used when referring to God.” The will of God and the place of the Cross in our lives were also dominant features of her spirituality. Like Julie, she wrote many letters which have been preserved. In so many ways, the stories of the two Foundresses run along parallel lines. In Mary MacKillop’s family and Congregation, there are definite links with the Sisters of Notre Dame and Fort William.
From the beginning of our college, the Sisters of Notre Dame urged students to live Gospel imperatives by building community and helping those in need. Formerly College of Notre Dame, founded in San José in 1851 and moved to Belmont, CA in 1923, Notre Dame de Namur University (NDNU) grew and became co-educational. Community service expanded with this growth. For many years, faculty advised students to take advantage of internship opportunities to get “hands on” experience in working with disadvantaged people. Gradually, community service became a part of the curriculum. Important at the University, the Dorothy Stang Center for Community Service and Social Justice keeps community needs and justice issues in the front of the student body. Established in 2006, the Center invites speakers, trains teachers for Community Service Learning, and also addresses environmental concerns. It provides educational background for recognizing and confronting unjust organizations. The Center promotes the Bonner Scholars, recipients of scholarship monies, who give commitment to community service and encourage other students to join them.

At Orientation, Freshmen choose community service projects, either at the local food bank, to sort out vegetables and stack canned goods, or at food kitchens, to serve lunch to people depending on a daily meal. First-year students spend at least three hours a week in community service. In a farming town, Solidad, they organize a “carnival” for the children of migrant laborers. **This experience is a revelation to our middle-class students who listen to the children worried about being drawn into gangs and observe conditions in the migrant camps.**

**Presence in the Tenderloin**

For twenty-five years, Sociology Professor, Don Stannard-Friel, has given a class in the Tenderloin Area, one of the poorest sections in San Francisco. He teaches “Street Wise Sociology,” addressing the needs and pressures of those living in poverty and in a high crime area where drugs and prostitution are prevalent. Taking his students to live in a closed shelter for a week, he provides an experience of living without a permanent home and sharing quarters with strangers. Many students have never been in any area like the Tenderloin; they have the opportunity, for the first time, to speak with people who are homeless. Several students comment that this learning, especially through conversations with young people their own age, has changed their perceptions of why people are homeless.

Each year, Don takes seventy students to the Tenderloin to give children a Halloween Party. Before the holiday, he searches with a few students for “safe houses,” where people agree to welcome children to their homes for candy. Then NDNU students put balloons on doors of these houses so students know where to bring the children. After “trick or treats,” all gather at the Children’s Community Center for a grand party with traditional Halloween games, refreshments, face painting, and creative arts. Some alumni, having been to Halloween in the Tenderloin as students, take part in the celebration.

**“The Gift” in Action**

This year, NDNU celebrated 25 years of *The Christmas Carol: A Musical Version*. Michael Elkins, Chair of the Theater Arts Department and star of the show, playing Scrooge, offers this musical free to the public. So the production is called “The Gift.” He believed that the college needed to give back more to the community. He suggested that those coming to the production bring non-perishable foods or toys for children in need. The performance, from a modest beginning, is now seen each year by over four thousand people. Three tons of food items and over 1500 toys are given to Fire Departments in San Mateo County for distribution to disadvantaged children through “Toys for Tots” programs. Six food banks in this county now depend on the Christmas Carol to supply a growing food demand for those living in poverty. Each year, some of the cast perform sections of the play in the Tenderloin and buy, out of their own pockets, toys for the children.
Calls to Action

For 18 years, Sociologist, Cheryl Joseph has brought students to another area in San Francisco with many homeless. Before Thanksgiving, Cheryl, Sr. Patricia McGlinn and others make turkey and peanut butter/jelly sandwiches, and other treats for a Thanksgiving Picnic with homeless people in Golden Gate Park. One student organizes the picnic and gathers classmate volunteers for service. Cheryl and her students offer four hours of this holiday to provide food and conversation to homeless women and men. Cheryl asked one man why he came to the picnic instead of going to a program serving a regular Thanksgiving dinner in San Francisco. He replied, “Because you folks talk with us.” This is another program educating NDNU students to the plight of the homeless.

A “Call to Action” Day is a newer program at the University. In March, students serve for one day at various sites. Last year, 240 students, wearing yellow T-shirts with the NDNU logo and “Call to Action,” volunteered at fifteen sites: food banks, shelters, and food kitchens.

Efforts of the University, in raising awareness and encouraging students to bring the “good news” to those in need, have had a profound effect on students during their college years and beyond.

Besides volunteer opportunities, community service projects are part of the curriculum. Each year, NDNU students serve over 110,000 hours in human services in San Mateo County, as one requirement for Masters’ Degrees. Students experience their chosen academic fields in various settings. Through required subjects and volunteer opportunities, students learn a commitment to give to the community in need.

St. Julie used to say, “We cannot do all the good there is to be done.” College students know there is much good they can do. NDNU is trying to better our world, by building community and helping those in need.
New Concepts for Education in Nicaragua

By Sister Sandra Price, SNDDeN

I live and serve in the municipality of Mulukukú, Nicaragua with a community in mission: 5 Misioneras de Cristo, a lay woman, her daughter, and a lay man who is a delegate of the Word. With our 9-member team, our educational ministry extends into many areas and age groups. Our team trains catechists for 54 rural communities as part of the parish. The catechists prepare the people for Baptism, Holy Eucharist, Confirmation and Matrimony. Twice a year, a priest offers Mass and celebrates the Sacraments. Our team arranges workshops throughout the year at the Mulukukú Center and in the rural communities. Our center comprises an assembly hall, classrooms, library, kitchen, dining room, chapel, dormitories for 75 people, an office, sewing workshop, two houses for the delegate and for 6 women religious and 2 laywomen ministering here. We coordinate basic education given by teachers from local communities in 12 rural one-room schools, first through third grades; we educate children, not able to enroll in regular classes with trained teachers. We assist literacy teachers in 13 communities.

Educational programs at Mulukukú include also primary courses for young people living in areas without schools. We offer an intensive course twice a year: four weeks for young men followed by six weeks for young women. Students must be at least 15 years old and recommended by their communities. We teach with basic texts used nationally for first to sixth grades. The day is long and rigorous, beginning at 5 a.m. when the students make the tortillas, clean and set up classrooms. Morning prayer at 6:30 a.m. is followed by breakfast; classes begin at 8 a.m. and end at 5 p.m. The day closes with evening prayer at 6:30 followed by study hour, and lights out at 9:30. Classes on Saturday finish at 3 p.m. On Sunday after Mass, the students learn sewing, embroidery, cooking, music and dancing.

An effective pre-school is a new concept for parents, difficult for them to comprehend its importance. The Montessori Pre-school has 38 children who come mainly from the poor neighbourhood directly behind the center. Some wealthy parents send their children daily from the other side of the river. Consistent with St. Julie Billiart’s belief, the Sisters accept a few rich families to support our major work for those who live in poverty. The team hopes to offer workshops for pre-school teachers in the state schools of our municipality. We assist rural health leaders by getting them training in health care, creating an organization for mutual support and obtaining resources for use in their communities.

Gender Equality Workshops

Gender Equality Workshops at our Center are well-received. With help from a group called Lux Mundi, four young men and four women attended workshops in Managua last year. Now, they are conducting workshops in their communities with groups of young people, and evaluative assemblies for the parish pastoral workers. Violence toward women and the subordinate place that they have been given in a “machismo” culture are serious problems in families. The unspoken sin of incest is considered normal by many men and silently accepted by women out of fear and shame. Creating a moral consciousness through education is one way to eliminate cultural traditions allowing this violence. Gender equality workshops are an educative tool for addressing the problem.

Story of Growth for Education

In 1999, my work began with organizing rural primary schools in the mountain communities of the parish where there were no schools, except in the main towns and along the highway to Managua. In a year, we opened 35 schools taught by campesinos; some had only third or fourth grade preparation themselves. Intensive primary courses helped these teachers. By 2001, there were 54 schools. Then, with the split of the original parish, I moved to the new parish in Mulukukú, in the southern part of the parish. I passed the schools

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to a Nicaraguan coordinator. Now I help to build classrooms and obtain funding for over 50 schools. Parents do the construction under the direction of one master carpenter. Funds from donors pay for materials and the master carpenter.

*To support catechetics and education, the Sisters of Notre Dame rely on our generous donors.*

### Ministry for the Handicapped

In 1996, **Sr. Rebecca Trujillo**, at the request of the Bishop of Matagalpa, began a ministry to families with handicapped members in the diocese. With 284 high school students and five social service agencies in 48 neighborhoods, Sr. Rebecca identified over 500 families having children with handicaps. Visiting families, she connected mothers of children with different handicaps. Reflecting on Scripture, mothers recognized that God loves them in their family suffering. They articulated needs and *Familias Especiales de Santa Julia Billiart* (*Special Families of St. Julie Billiart*) was born and organized. Dreams became reality in planning with people from different groups and countries. Families saw that they were not alone in their struggles.

Celebrating 15 years, this integrated program meets needs of handicapped people in health, nutrition, education, social integration, recreation, employment, and spiritual growth. With mother leaders in 48 barrios, 115 employees in five centers, this program directs people with handicaps to work and earn a living. The largest employer of handicapped individuals in northern Nicaragua, *Familias Especiales* matches the needs and talents of people and makes all areas of life more accessible to them.

### Ministry of Presence and Animation

**Sr. Meg Walsh**’s ministry is one of presence and animation. With the support of the bishops, she accompanies young people of four dioceses. Sr. Meg works for the spiritual animation of the young. With other religious congregations, she offers retreats and days of reflection. In 2011, the Sisters of Nicaragua will host three discernment weekends to help young people find a path of joy that gives them life and will make them better witnesses to God’s presence in our world today.
Regular readers of *Good Works* will recall the story of the African Photovoltaic Project (APP) in June 2009. At that time, one site in Ngidinga, Congo had been in operation for over a year. We were planning more projects for the villages of Lemfu, Kitenda and Pelende. In April 2010, I went to Congo to visit all three sites where the new construction would take place. I wanted to see the preparations, talk with the Sisters to explain, answer questions, and prepare them for the installation, soon to begin with systems using a network of solar panels, batteries, water purifiers, satellite dishes and wireless connections to the internet. Schools, dispensaries and clinics where the Sisters minister in education and health care will be able to improve the lives of all in their locales.

In the meantime, our Mission Support Office raised over $1 million from many sources to fund these new projects. During 2010, the installation took place over an extended period. The materials, having arrived in Kinshasa, took a long time in processing through customs, and the satellite dishes were held up even longer. Local labor was hired for all construction tasks, with oversight provided by our electrical engineer, Louis Casey. He spent about a month at the sites, a week or so at each one. Louie worked via internet with Sisters and site technicians for the completion of the internet hook-ups in November. From information transmitted via the internet to a Website, the functioning of each system is monitored by those responsible at the sites, and others interested throughout the world. 

*All will soon be welcome to view live-streaming information from the Congo. The Website, still under construction, is http://www.powerofthesun.org/*.

These recently constructed sites have been in operation for electricity production since July, and for internet since November. Testimony from the Congolese tells the story. The Sisters, their staffs, teachers, and neighbors are extremely happy with the addition of the internet. Now the children see places and things that they have never seen before, such as elephants and monkeys. They bring chairs from their classrooms to the cyber café; the teachers explain what they are seeing.

The Sisters teach the local priests, nurses and teachers how to do research on the internet. They have noticed the improvement in the material now being researched and used in classrooms. The Sisters tally the minutes used and charge a small fee to the users. They anticipate further growth in the months ahead and look forward to expansion of the cyber cafes with new strength for the wireless connections and more laptops for greater participation.

From the beginning, one key element of the APP has been that the Sisters understand the project, are able to care for it, maintain it, and protect it over the intended life of 25 years. Therefore, an educational plan for the Sisters has been underway for several years. Sr. Gertrude Mwanakasi has studied for three years as an electrician and Sr. Claudine Dumbi has learned through experience about computers, wireless systems, and how to deal with providers. The entire province membership has been given instruction on the use of computers, e-mail, and internet over the last several years. 

*We have invested in computers for the communities and schools, and donors have been so generous in their support of all aspects of the project.*

My visit to the Assembly of the Congo-Kinshasa Province in February was intended to encourage Sisters to view themselves as an “engine of growth” for their villages, towns, and even cities. In the future, we hope to create a new venture, allowing the project to expand even further, beyond the Notre Dame world of schools and hospitals to other religious communities and private educational and health care facilities. This expansion will be carefully researched and nurtured slowly for depth as well as numerical growth.

The response of the Sisters has been enthusiastic and we have celebrated together the many blessings of growth in the Congo Province in recent years. *Ah! How good is the Good God!*
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
Zimbabwe

Latin America
Brazil
Mexico
Nicaragua
Peru

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

Asia
Japan

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France
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