Life & Light in New Sites

“Just so, your light must shine before others.”
Matthew 5:16

See article page 4
Dear Friends of Notre Dame de Namur,

When Pope Francis opened a Twitter account, he magnetized a wide audience to the use of the current and growing sphere of electronic communication. His statistics show that he holds first place with 8,440,855 followers on Twitter. More important than the cast of followers are the inspiring messages he Tweets to encourage and inspire us to live the “Joy of the Gospel,” care for the environment through our choices to reduce our “carbon footprint” (*Laudato Si*); and be the presence of God’s Mercy at all times.

Inspired by Pope Francis and the effective, positive use of World Wide Web, we are ready to go online with our publications of *Good Works*. The magazine will become our Website online publication. It will continue to illustrate where the “Joy of the Gospel” is making a significant impact in the lives of people with whom we witness to new life and hope. Some stories about our ministries and the existing WordPress blogs from the UN and J&P are already on our Website. An abundance of information is only one mouse-click away. (See page 15 of this issue of Good Works to learn more about our Website.)

We want to maintain contact with you, and we trust you will follow us on our Website. Your prayerful and financial support enable us to be faithful to “our common aim, which is to express in our time, as Julie did in hers, that God is good.” Our response “in our time” includes accepting the challenge to find and apply multiple means of communication to proclaim that God is indeed good, and consistently active in our history.

If the prophet, Isaiah, and the apostle, Paul, were writing today, imagine how they might contemporize the original Scriptural verse, from “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, and brings good news…” to: how beautiful are the hearts and minds that use electronic communication and social media to announce peace, and bring good news and witness to the Mercy of God! (Reference, Isaiah 52:7 and Romans 10:15)

Follow us and encourage your family and friends to see us online!

*In God’s Goodness,*

Sister Teresita Weind, SNDdeN Congregational Leader

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*From the Editor: Good Works*
Life & Light in New Sites

By Sister Lorraine Connell, SNDdeN

In 2005, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN) entered into a marvelous venture to bring life and light to people and communities in Africa. Through the African Photovoltaic Project (APP), the leadership with the membership in our religious Congregation has given a serious commitment to action for equal access to information and communication for all our Sisters throughout the world. In researching this possibility, it became evident to the congregational finance staff, charged with pursuing this issue, that there were more serious implications to this commitment. Especially in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria, lack of any infrastructure was a challenge for accessing power for electricity, water purification and technology for communications. Research highlighted the ministries and communities in places deprived of bare necessities for life sustenance. Providing an infrastructure for stable and reliable electricity became a major goal.

We found an electrical engineer, Louis Casey who was drawn to the mission and capable of creating systems that would meet the needs. With some funding and leadership approval, Louis tested the system of solar panels with storage batteries in a prototype of a system, built at Cuvilly Arts and Earth Center in Ipswich, MA and it worked successfully! This prototype resulted in the emergence of the APP as it exists today.

Current & New

Today the APP, also called the Power of the Sun Project, provides access to electricity, water purification systems and technology for communications in four sites in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and in five sites in Nigeria.

Nigeria Sites

In Nigeria, the Sisters have two full systems now, the first at Fugar (2006) at the Postulate house where new members enter the Congregation and the second system at Awkunanaw where there are two flourishing Notre Dame schools. Also, we have installed solar panels for power and lighting at the community houses in Abuja, Enugu, and Ilorin. The Sisters are grateful to the Congregation for providing life and light to their ministries and communities in these places. They realize that the generosity of those supporting the APP is protecting the environment from the old generator’ carbon emissions, providing power for refrigeration and cooling and the use of technology for research, study, development and communications with the wider world. We are now expanding the project in Nigeria to add another site in Oro. The workmen are making progress in installing the solar panels with battery storage, in a project for new life for the Sisters serving in ministries in surrounding areas.

Continued
Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

Success in Sustainability

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur know that, only with the support of so many people does the African Photovoltaic Project continue to be successful in providing life and light to multiple African communities. In these eleven years, Sr. Leonore Coan, Director of the Mission Support with the assistance of many SNDdeN provinces and many generous donors has received over $4,000,000 for this project. The Congregation has spent over $3,000,000 while reserving the remaining million dollars for the third upgrade, currently in process.

An idea which evolved from a mandate at the 2002 General Chapter for equal access to information and communication through technology grew into a major miracle for sustainable life for the Sisters, their ministries, communities and the people in two developing countries where the Sisters of Notre Dame live and serve. From the beginning, the Sisters have been involving the local communities in the installation and maintenance of the systems to insure the ongoing viability of the systems. Louis Casey who designed the system continues to consult the Sisters on their preferences for installation of the systems.

Gratitude for Support

Many readers of Good Works have shown tangible interest and support in sending donations to help fund this project. This article attempts to give a progress report on the current status of the project, to show how the support and contributions of so many donors have enabled the growth and development and to thank all contributors for success of the APP in bringing light and life to the people in two African countries.

We, SNDdeN, offer gratitude in prayer for all who have made this project a success for many people.
Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN) make known God’s goodness as we respond to specific needs “in our time.” This year, 2016, marks a milestone in the life and Mission of the Sisters in the ZimSA Unit (Zimbabwe and South Africa).

St. Peter Claver Primary School in Maokeng, Kroonstad, South Africa is celebrating one hundred years of quality education begun and continuing by our religious congregation. Currently the Primary (Elementary) School has 504 pupils, from Grade R (K), and Grades 1 - 7, and 27 teachers. A long-awaited dream, the High School (Post Primary, or Secondary), opened in 2010 on the site of the former convent in the Kroonstad suburb called Jordania, has 284 pupils with 17 teachers in ten classes in Grades 8 - 12. Both schools have a small team of administrators and support staff. In the Primary School, Sr. Gertrude Izuchukwu teaches Religious Education and does pastoral care and Sr. Chantal Kissimbila is responsible for finances. In the Secondary (High)

School, Sr. Marie McLaughlin is the chaplain and Sr. Kay Bridge tutors students. Sr. Brigid Rose Tiernan represents the SNDdeN owners on the Board of Governors.

A Remarkable History

In the early 20th Century, a racially divided South Africa catered to ‘white’ students in every educational establishment. Arriving in Kroonstad in 1907, the first Sisters started by teaching the children of railway workers in the camp on the edge of the town. They saw also another great educational and evangelization need on the side of the town where the Sesotho people lived. Unable to speak the Sesotho language, the Sisters were not prepared to open a school for these children. Undaunted, the Sisters found lay educators to teach them the vernacular Sesotho language. The Sisters began by teaching a few black Catholic children religious instruction on Saturdays and Sundays. Finally in 1916, with blessings from Congregational Leadership in Namur, Belgium, St. Peter Claver Primary School opened in Kroonstad, under the direction of Sr. Andrina Ledwick, assisted by Sr. Mary Theresa Dawkins. On the first day, the Sisters, ringing a bell, walked up and down dusty streets and invited children to come to their small school in Marabastad. This first school with four brick classrooms expanded in time, as did the number of children. During the earliest years, (1916-1971), Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur maintained the leadership of the school and worked closely with dedicated lay teachers. Inspectors of Education gave positive reports about the school.

“In our time”
By Sister Brigid Rose Tiernan, SNDdeN

“In our time”
By Sister Brigid Rose Tiernan, SNDdeN

“Our common aim... to express in our time, as Julie did in hers, that God is good.” (Constitutions 9)
In those 55 years, the principals, Sisters Brendan Dalton, Alphonse Byrne, Monica (Mary) McLeish and Veronica Chapman faced varying developments and multiple struggles with Education Department officials, and teachers who came and went while other committed educators remained as partners with the Sisters. Every year the children participated in singing competitions, sports events and went on excursions to places of educational interest, even the airport and zoo in Johannesburg. They succeeded in examinations admitting them to secondary schools in the district and beyond.

Leadership and Growth
An ambivalent relationship existed between the school leadership and the Education Department. While local officials praised academic and other successes, they remained suspicious of the Sisters’ connection with the Catholic Church. For decades, the municipality refused the Sisters’ request for land on which to build the classrooms to accommodate more than a thousand pupils. Finally in 1971, the municipality approved a new school which was then built with funds donated by the SNDdeN British Province. The given municipal land on clay soil has presented many ongoing challenges to builders who try to construct permanent structures.

For about nine decades, parents asked the Sisters to expand the school to Grade 12. This dream became a reality in 2010. Mrs. Zunelle De Ru was appointed Head of the whole School in November 2010. In 2011, Grade 10 class enrolled on the Primary School site. Plans to raise funds for another class and more rooms for a fully operative and functional school brought St. Peter Claver High School to the site of the old convent in the Kroonstad suburb. Assisted in 2016 by an enlarged management team, Mrs. De Ru is the Head of both Primary and High Schools.

Planning and Development
Fund-raising efforts continue for completing the new school hall, with a kitchen and administration rooms, in the Primary School. Misean Cara in Ireland has provided partial funding for this building still needing more funds. The High School is now seeking funding for a librarian and for renovating the old convent to add three more classrooms. The plan is to move Grade 7 from the Primary School to the High School in reorganising the curriculum into a new structure. At present, the curriculum falls naturally into these divisions:

- Grades 1 - 3 ~ Foundation Phase
- Grades 4 - 6 ~ Intermediate Phase
- Grades 7 - 9 ~ Senior Phase
- Grades 10 - 12, with Further Education and Training Phase

The Plan is to restructure the buildings also with 6 grades at the High School, and keep 6 grades at the Primary School. Faculty development is ongoing.

Through the years, the Sisters have often assisted teachers, staff members, alumnae/alumni with academic and professional development, and accompanied them through their continuing studies. A group of former students is assisting the Sisters and organizing events to celebrate the 100th Anniversary; St. Peter Claver School moves into a bright future for all levels “in our time.”

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, legal owners of the site and building, share the direction and leadership of the school with a Board of Governors. (See www.oldconvent.co.za.)
POWER OF ONE: Impact of St. Julie Billiart

By Sister Huguette Georges, SNDdeN

St. Julie Billiart died on April 8, 1816 in Namur, Belgium. As she was dying, she sang Mary’s Magnificat in French.

“My soul magnifies the Lord... All generations will call me blessed.”

Like Mary, for whom she named her Congregation, Julie made a lasting impact on our world, especially on five continents where the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur live and serve in ministry. Her life, spirituality and values have inspired and influenced generations of children and adults for two centuries.

At a March 2015 gathering of Directors of Schools in Belgium and France, Sr. Suzanne DeMeersman, Province Moderator, stimulated ideas and touched hearts for celebrating this anniversary of St. Julie Billiart’s death. In June 2015, Sr. Marie-Thérèse Béget gathered a committee of school directors, alumnae/alumni, the General Archivist and Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur from the two Belgian Provinces. Beginning with an inquiry sent to schools for proposed activities, the planning evolved for ways to celebrate the 200th anniversary as a Notre Dame Family. School administrators, teachers and staff agreed on the importance of networking for this bicentenary and working as colleagues in a united effort.

The festivities will begin on April 8, 2016 and conclude at the time of Christmas vacation. All schools are sending information and plans to Sr. Marie-Thérèse by September 2016.

Some ideas for all the schools are already in process:

- A flash drive containing information about the life of St. Julie and her founding of the Congregation will be distributed to all schools.
- A newspaper, called The Julie Relay, will include news and information about bicentenary activities/events in the schools.

- Plaques will be posted on April 11, 2016 at the entrance of all schools in Belgium and France. These plaques will say:

  “You are here in a school which lives the values of St. Julie Billiart and where each person finds his/her place and works with joy.”

  This effort emphasizes the strength of an educational system in which all experience joy and a sense of belonging.

- On the 8th day of each month, good words of St. Julie will be given to students and teachers for reflection and for learning life lessons taught by Julie.

- Groups of students and teachers will visit the Heritage Centre in Namur so that they will know and remember for a long time the origins and life of our Congregation.

Certain schools in Belgium and France have planned varied celebrations:

- In Berchem, a digital screen will appear in front of the school with images and quotations from St. Julie. All girls with the name Julie will receive a gift.

- In Namur, on May 3, 2016, the students will release hundreds of white balloons with cards attached, rising in the sky in Namur. On each card will be written the sentence: “I feel deeply for Namur something which touches my heart.” Who knows if one of these balloons, landing on firm earth, will be a messenger of the spirit of St. Julie for one or other person picking it up on the side of the road or in the center of a garden.

- In Saint-Hubert, the school is making a CD with songs on St. Julie which will include also those of Sr. Marie-Ange Bonmariage.

- In Orvilliers-Sorel, the school is inviting all groups of pilgrims to come while they are visiting the birthplace of St. Julie in Cuvilly.

Will you join these schools in organizing some event or project for the Bicentenary Year? The schools in Belgium and France invite and encourage other schools on five continents to communicate any events and activities that you will be doing this year.”

Has the power of this one person, Julie, influenced you and does she have an impact on your life today? How will you celebrate the life and gift of St. Julie Billiart? May this Jubilee Year strengthen the bonds of our Notre Dame Family and announce to the world that God is Good.

Students in Namur celebrate St. Julie.

Sr. Suzanne DeMeersman discusses plans for the Bicentenary with Directors of Notre Dame schools.
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.

How to support our Mission?

- Give Charitable Gift Annuities
- Remember Sisters in your will
- Contribute gifts of stocks
- Send gift envelopes and more
- Contribute online

For more information, please contact:
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Website: www.sndden.org

The 2014 Chapter Calls of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur challenge our Congregation to consider specific actions for protecting the environment. This call involves a new venture for the publication, Good Works. Our goal is to use a different medium for telling our stories to our wide audience while responding to the demands of our time and new technology, as encouraged by Pope Francis in his Encyclical, Laudato Si. In these past months, we have been proactive in planning a transition from a published magazine to an online magazine, downloadable, printable for home/work/school.

Our Website manager, Sr. Angele Lewis, SNDdeN and I have been experimenting with various vehicles for an online magazine. At the request of educators for a user-friendly communication in an “online/wireless” environment, we have already been publishing stories in a Good Works Blog on WordPress.

This March 2016 Good Works is the last printed edition. Our plan is to introduce an online Good Works magazine in mid-June 2016. Over the next few months, we will redirect our Good Works Blog to our two Websites (www.sndden.org and www.notredameonline.org). From these portals, you will be able to subscribe by clicking on the feature: “Follow this Blog via Email.” We intend to post a .pdf at the end of each story, for ease of online reading and printing. You will find a preview of our new online publication, now in process, at our growing site for Good Works Blog: (https://snddengw.wordpress.com).

Communicating our stories to those who support our Mission on five continents is a priority. We will continue to share the Joy of the Gospel in stories about ministries of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur internationally. We thank you for your ongoing support.

United in proclaiming God’s goodness,
Sr. Anne Stevenson, SNDdeN, Director of Communications
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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.

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.

Visit our Website at www.sndden.org and scroll to the bottom of home page to:

- Like us on Facebook
- Follow us on Twitter
- Subscribe to our e-newsletter online

- Read our stories
- Share in our hope
- Rejoice in God’s goodness

Visit international Web sites of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur at:
www.sndden.org ~ www.notredameonline.org ~ www.ndvs.org