“For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.”

Luke 12: 34
Dear Friends of Notre Dame de Namur,

Innovative ideas and practices have a “winsome” quality. Some are short lived. On the other hand, the long endured, tested, tried, and true practices do more than “winsome;” they captivate our interest, appreciation and support. **Education, our primary ministry**, along with medical and pastoral care have a secure place in our mission.

COVID-19 spawned creativity, development and imagination among teachers, nurses, and pastoral care givers. Some of our Sisters were and are on the front lines as “first responders,” while others are “behind the scenes,” faithfully attending to more than “reading, writing, and arithmetic.” The stories in this issue of **Good Works** illustrate the ever new ways of “calling forth and leading out” the gifts and qualities of children, young, seasoned and senior adults.

The past seven to eight months kept most of us focused on what is best for the growth and development of our common humanity, as well as what most appropriately reveals the **treasure in our hearts**. We are confident that you contributed time and personal service when and where social distancing permitted.

**We thank you for your continued love, prayer and support** for our Congregational outreach to people in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the United States of America.

In God’s Goodness,

Sister Teresita Weind, SNDdeN
Congregational Leader
Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

GoodWorks ~ October 2020

**EDUCATION FOR LIFE**

**Alive with Mission: Priority for Education**

By Sister Judith Esther Onditi, SNDdeN, Deputy Head Teacher

In 2010, the Mission of the Gospel inspired Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN) to open Notre Dame Educational Centre (NDEC) in Malava, Kenya. Six Sisters, assisted by our aspirants and postulants, serve about 300 pupils, from early childhood to class 8. NDEC’s motto, Educating for Life, promotes St. Julie Billiart’s educational ideals of a holistic education. The Centre attracts many students in a learner friendly approach to education, different from the exam-oriented system in Kenyan schools. We view learner-oriented education as creative and practical. Fully engaged, the student takes an active role and centre stage in his/her own learning process. This stretches the learner in every area and involves different activities, including technology or applied technical know-how. The student discovers new horizons and disentangles his/her own capabilities, while applying new skills to achieve the greatest potential.

We, SNDdeN, appreciate this Competency Based curriculum, now used in Kenyan schools, enabling full participation of students with creative discoveries in the learning process. Our learners, even outside the confines of formal education, become creative in manipulating positively their environment. As facilitators in the learning process, our Sisters realize that we are not only teaching for now but we are preparing future and responsible citizens, ready to apply knowledge and to find solutions to everyday problems.

**RESOURCE CENTRE**

NDEC is located in rural Kenya where most families lack any basic infrastructure for electricity. The Sisters sponsor financially some learners who come from very challenging homes, and lack basic life-needs including, food, shelter, etc. In 2018, we opened a small resource centre, giving students access to materials required to complement what they learn and discover.

This facility has a capacity for only 45 learners who come in shifts enabling learners at all levels to access these resources. Sisters, as well as postulants and aspirants, are always available to support our learners in using the materials for expanding their knowledge and skills. In the future, we hope to enlarge the centre to accommodate more learners, even from nearby schools and the community. NDEC confirms education of the whole person as our SNDdeN priority ministry since 1804!

By Sister Magdaline Mikwa, SNDdeN, Administrative Secretary

Each day, people from different backgrounds visit our Administrative Office for various reasons. Teachers, staff, pupils, parents and guests stop first at my office. It gives me joy to be a welcoming presence in the school, especially for the children. Some come with excitement, while others wear fearful faces of the unknown. My ministry involves creating an environment where the child is peaceful, happy and comfortable, and feels at home. In the right environment, each child becomes relaxed; other activities fall into place. I contribute to this holistic education of the children, and also in a special outreach to parents and guardians. Everyone’s story counts. Listening attentively to our children, parents, guardians and all guests, I do joyfully my clerical work for a smooth school operation and I give witness to the goodness of God.

Most parents and guardians in rural Kenya are peasant farmers, with very little income. Unable to finance their children’s education, the parents struggle with cultural, social and economic challenges. I have learnt that doing everything in the office in a loving, caring and understanding way enables a smooth and coordinated ministry with parents, children, Sisters and staff. Following the progress of the children is the best link for parents and guardians with the different departments and persons who support them in a specialized way.

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Srs. Dorice Sumbati Shisali, Judith Esther Onditi, Theckler Mwaka, Susan Libendi, Magdaline Mikwa and Maximilla Mutuba, SNDdeN plan together with joyful excitement at NDEC.

Sr. Judith Esther Onditi meets with new parents.

Sr. Magdaline Mikwa meets with new parents.
By Sister Maximilla Mutuba, SNDdeN, Coordinator of Early Childhood and Development Centre (ECDC)

St. Julie’s call to “educate for life,” inspires me, as I teach children from ages 2 to 6 years old. I love my ministry with children in early childhood; I give my best in preparing these little ones for formal education. In collaboration with the ECDC staff, I plan activities for the week. It thrills me to observe the day-care children arriving, joyful and excited, each morning, as they run to meet the Sisters. They recognize the Notre Dame cross, worn by the Sisters, making the children feel at home. They enter spontaneously into song and dance. Recalling Julie’s teachings, I have the opportunity to make school a place where our children love to be, with a sense of belonging, in their early years. Our daily interaction with children in this tender age prepares them for the future. It is a blessing and a challenge for Sisters and staff to provide a conducive environment! The simplicity and trust of each child stretches us to engage with our children in practical activities. We try to develop creativity with suitable materials, appealing for these ages. With limited resources, we work overtime to supplement materials acquired through funds from our Sisters and benefactors.

The children’s learning extends in their home environments to siblings, parents/guardians and friends in their neighbourhood. People refer to our Centre, as the “school of happy and welcoming Sisters.” It is a place of healing for some children. At the close of the day, in returning home, some children cry and cling to the Sisters and staff. This prompted us to initiate collaborative sessions with parents and guardians for encouraging conducive home environments. We give the children playing materials to share school stories and experiences with the family. Bringing materials back to school, they explain their use at home, another response for the uniqueness of each child.

COVID-19 has invaded the lives of our children, unable to come to school. Some parents telephoning the Sisters, ask them to assure the children that the school is closed now, but they will be able share their stories when school re-opens. We continue to offer simple activities to engage the children at home in their own environments.

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

Social Outreach

By Sister Susan Libendi, SNDdeN, Coordinator of Social Outreach Programme

As Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN), we respond to specific needs in our time. We believe that God expects the best from us, and inspires us to reach out to our brothers and sisters. We are inspired by St. Julie who insisted that we “exist for the poor, absolutely for the poor.”

She called us to make known God’s goodness and love with and among people living in poverty. My ministry contributes to this SNDdeN Mission for many vulnerable families. Parents contribute to this Social Outreach Programme, addresses various needs of the community and the most vulnerable in the Malava area. We aim to visit households, gather information, initiate economic activities for parents’ self-reliance to provide new income, to help families receiving financial assistance, and to familiarise ourselves with local communities.

We engage children and parents in activities generating some minimal income for their households. When our families meet to share their struggles, we help them and the surrounding community to find hope in different processes of healing. In collaboration with our postulants, I visit families to experience their reality of life. By interacting within these households, without any pre-conceived judgements, I live the call and
Mission of Jesus Christ. I listen, learn, and allow myself to be transformed by my brothers and sisters, made vulnerable by the circumstances of life. In partnership with other service providers, I organise workshops for parents facing critical times to give them opportunities for finding creative solutions and practical ways for becoming self-reliant.

Spending time with children from these households, I observe their self-esteem and confidence re-awakened as I teach them what they need to know for life. During the holidays, I follow up on school attendance and progress of our children, to strengthen the bonds between the children and parents at home in their own environment. Parents and children experience the transformation that education brings to individuals and society.

As a private Catholic school, without any government subsidy, NDEC relies on school fees, a major source of income to meet expenses in our school. Through funds received from donors, our Congregational Leadership Team supports our Mission with small grants for scholarships for needy children and for small income generating activities for their families.

We have begun a chicken project in which parents and children raise chickens, sell the eggs and provide a small income, important for struggling families. The goals are to empower families in becoming self-sustaining, to give them confidence in taking charge of their own lives and to participate in decisions which affect them. This project enables parents to pay school fees as well as to manage their own households.

In December 2019, we conducted with our parents a workshop to raise awareness in educating our pupils for life. The participants discussed issues of concern for young people and ways of working with them to ensure a brighter future. The event aimed at revitalizing efforts by the parents and guardians in accompanying their children in education. They discussed ways to become self-sustaining and to take charge of their own lives.

By Sister Theckler Mwaka, SNDdeN, Coordinator of Nutrition and Worship

NDEC attracts children from all backgrounds. For children to be happy, stay active, and concentrate during indoor and outdoor lessons, it is vital for them to be healthy. Our focus on education for life includes good health. At school, we ensure that children have a balanced diet, since good nutrition is important in enabling them to remain alert and happy. I work with the kitchen department which provides a simple and balanced diet meal for the children.

A clean environment is critical. I encourage the children and staff to ensure that hygienic standards are maintained in the school. With the Sisters in our community and in collaboration with the teachers, we organize talks for the children on cleanliness and hygiene, with specific emphasis on personal hygiene and a clean environment. Our school directives insist on clean drinking water and the hand-washing, after toilet visits, as well as before and after eating. Through our Social Outreach Programme, we provide sanitary essentials for your girls from vulnerable homes.

WORSHIP AND EUCHARIST

In collaboration with other Sisters, I coordinate the worship programme. NDEC links the children for worship to the Pontifical Missionary Children's Programme at the parish level. The school is connected to St. Theresa’s Catholic Parish in Malava. The parish priests comes to the school every Friday morning for the Eucharistic Liturgy. The children take time to practice music, liturgical dancing and serving at Mass. They participate enthusiastically in the celebration by taking the lead in making the Scripture Readings, singing and dancing. These small activities have enhanced the zeal of the children as they learn more about their faith.

I work closely with the SNDdeN postulants and aspirants in preparing NDEC pupils for Baptism, First Holy Communion and Confirmation. The worship group at school gives the children the opportunity to meet on a weekly basis to faith-sharing with Bible stories and liturgical dancing.

For all at NDEC, Wednesday is St. Julie Day. Children are open to hear stories of our foundress, especially her love for children, to see photos of St. Julie, the Sisters and to know more about our foundress and the Mission of Jesus.
La Mission vivante aux Pins verts en Belgique

Par Sœur Pascal-Marie Promme, SNDdeN : Membre de l’Equipe du Leadership de la Province de Belgique-Sud/France


Au cours du séjour, c’est par leur présence discrète, remplie de bonté et de bienveillance qu’elles témoignent en filles de Ste Julie Billiart.

Dans cette maison, des mouvements de jeunesse se succèdent pendant les vacances pour des camps d’une dizaine de jours. Ces groupes d’une cinquantaine de jeunes provenant souvent de milieux défavorisés sont autonomes.

Le staff d’encadrement assure tout ce qui est nécessaire au bon déroulement des diverses activités. Quelques petits ennuis techniques sont de bonnes occasions d’approfondir les relations avec les occupants de la maison.

Outre l’accueil des jeunes, en weekend, la maison ouvre la possibilité aux adultes de vivre des fêtes familiales : baptêmes, anniversaires… Le cadre verdoyant rend agréable le séjour d’adultes pour des sessions de formation. Un groupe d’archéologues de l’université libre de Bruxelles a bénéficié de l’infrastructure de la maison pour réaliser des fouilles dans le « bois du grand bon Dieu » ; sœur Virginie a été intégrée dans leurs recherches. En juin et en janvier, des étudiants universitaires viennent se préparer à leurs examens. Bref, les Pins verts sont un lieu de convivialité où le temps semble s’arrêter pour goûter plus pleinement et plus profondément des valeurs de la vie.

Cependant, la mission des sœurs Albertine et Virginie ne s’arrête pas là. Elles sont insérées dans la vie paroissiale, notamment dans le groupe des visiteurs de malades et la chorale des aînés. Lors des célébrations eucharistiques dominicales, elles y participent activement en joignant leurs voix aux autres membres de la chorale paroissiale. En semaine, les sœurs ouvrent leur oratoire aux chrétiens pour l’Eucharistie ou la prière personnelle.

Proches d’une maison de repos et de soins pour personnes âgées, elles visitent régulièrement ceux et celles qui le souhaitent. Elles les accompagnent par des moments d’échange, de prière. Régulièrement elles y animent l’Eucharistie et apportent la communion aux personnes qui ne peuvent pas se déplacer. Lorsque la célébration de l’Eucharistie n’est pas possible, elles portent la communion. Proches des personnes malades, elles n’hésitent pas à se déplacer pour leur apporter réconfort et soutien spirituel. Tous ces ministères ne s’improvisent pas sans participer régulièrement à des journées de formation des visiteurs de malades et des sessions liturgiques.

Dans cette région de la Thudinie, des situations de personnes en détresse ne manquent pas, aussi nos deux sœurs apportent leur soutien et s’unissent à d’autres membres de la Croix-Rouge pour leur venir en aide. Dans la ville de Thuin, la mission de nos deux sœurs ne passe pas inaperçue. Après le confinement, elles ont reçu le soutien de la mairie pour rouvrir « Les Pins verts ».

Dans le “bois du bon grand Dieu,” Sr Virginie assiste aux recherches des archéologues de l’Université libre de Bruxelles.

Ah ! qu’il est bon le bon Dieu !
Mission Alive at Les Pins Verts in Belgium

By Sr. Pascal-Marie Promme, SNDdeN
Translated by Sr. Evelyn McKenna, SNDdeN

In the Charleroi Region, in Thuin, Belgium, for many years the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur have carried on their Mission. From its origins in 1964, the large house, Les Pins Verts (Green Pines), near the Bois du grand bon Dieu (“Woods of the great good God”) was set aside to welcome camps for young people in order that they may benefit from a holy environment. Our Sisters live in the small house, formerly occupied by the caretaker. In 2007, our Congolese Sisters came to continue the Mission which had become too heavy for our Belgian Sisters. Sisters Albertine Nsoki and Virginie Makengo, SNDdeN, with the help of lay personnel, prepare all materials, oversee the property with much care and a lot of heart. In the course of any guest visits, by their quiet presence, filled with goodness and kindness, the Sisters give witness as daughters of St. Julie Billiart.

In this house, during vacation time, multiple activities follow one after the other in a 10-day camps for Scouts. These groups of about 50 young people, coming from disadvantaged milieux, are independent. The management staff insure that there is everything necessary for carrying out the diverse activities. Some few technical annoyances are good opportunities to deepen relationships with the occupants of the house. Besides the welcoming of young people, on weekends, the house opens up the possibility for adults to celebrate family occasions/feasts: Baptisms, anniversaries…etc. Verdant surroundings enrich the stay of adults for formation sessions. A group of archeologists from the free University of Brussels benefit from the infrastructure of the house to carry out excavations in the “Bois du grand bon Dieu”.

Continue to page 18
My story began in Nigeria where I was born and raised. I joined our religious community of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN) in the United States, in August 2007. I have been in the nursing profession for twenty-eight years. I joined this noble profession as a midwife in Nigeria but gained extensive nursing experience by working in various specialties in different teaching hospitals in Nigeria and across the United States.

Currently, I am a Charge Registered Nurse for the Stroke/Neuro Critical Care Unit of St. Agnes Hospital (Ascension Health) in Baltimore, MD. I take pride in this ministry of healing the sick and creating a positive impact on people’s lives. I offer counselling, aimed at empowering individuals and promoting total wellbeing. Regardless of my years of experience in healthcare, working in the front-lines and giving direct care to individuals affected with COVID-19 can be physically, mentally and psychologically challenging. Donning personal protective equipment (PPE) and especially wearing N-95 masks, over long hours, can be physically exhausting. However, putting smiles on the faces of patients and families impacted by this pandemic is the most rewarding and honorable service which I can render at this time.

**EXPERIENCE IN NIGERIA**

My passion in providing care for the sick emanated from my childhood experience. As a young child in Nigeria, I was a member of a children’s ministry. Basically, this ministry is poised at leading young children to God and mentoring them on how to bear one another’s burdens. As a member of this group, I ministered to the sick by laying hands and praying for them. This zeal as a young, innocent girl became a driving factor for my nursing career as well as for my calling to religious life as a SNDdeN. I enjoy what I do, with great joy and happiness. I realize what a great privilege it is to become who God has called me to be.

**COVID-19 UNIT IN ST. AGNES HOSPITAL**

St. Agnes Hospital is a faith-based organization, rooted in Catholic values and vision. For 12 years, I have enjoyed working in this hospital and health care facility. In this pandemic crisis, my medical unit was converted to a COVID-19 Unit. As a Sister in this nursing ministry, I consider my major service to provide special critical care to individuals who are seriously ill from the complications of this virus. I experience my service in nursing, especially now, as a time of reflection on our SNDdeN Mission, which inspires all our Sisters to be: “Women with hearts as wide as the world, who make known God’s goodness and love to all.”

I know that caring for patients facing the life threatening conditions from COVID-19 is a vital way of promoting our love of God and fulfilling this congregational mission to the sick and the dying. Besides nursing care to patients afflicted with COVID-19, I also devote some time in my full-time schedule to offer meditation and spiritual uplifting to patients who are so anxious about the disease or to those battling the loss of loved ones from this deadly disease. I am privileged to participate with those committed to alleviating human pain and suffering by offering holistic care through medicine and spiritual guidance. Such care strengthens the dignity and worth of each person.

I feel grateful and cherish the deep love and unflinching support of my family, friends and the Sisters in my religious community. They have helped me to give hope to the sick and the dying during these critical times, and to be faithful to our Mission in making known the goodness of God to all. I offer thanksgiving to God for his goodness and mercies, in enabling me to serve with others on the front lines of the pandemic.
On the Front Lines as a Chaplain

Sister Kathleen Gallivan, SNDdeN
Director of Spiritual Care: Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Boston, MA

Brigham and Women’s Hospital (“The Brigham”) is a large academic medical center in Boston, Massachusetts, with a staff of about 17,000 employees. We care for 800 in-patients, their families and thousands of outpatients who come for specialized care, from the local area and also from around the world. As Director of Spiritual Care, my ministry includes directing a department of multi-faith chaplains, providing care to patients and families, supporting hospital employees and a training program for women and men who want to become professional chaplains. Throughout the year, about 20 students intern in our chaplaincy program.

In my eighteen years at the Brigham, I have experienced many crisis events, including people injured in the Boston Marathon bombings in 2005, the tragic shooting of a hospital physician and critical cases from accidents and fires! The COVID-19 crisis has been for me the most challenging experience. Since March 2020, we have treated over 1,000 patients with COVID-19, with more than 200 who have required hospitalization. Most are very sick and many die. Visiting my first critically-ill COVID-19 patient, I prayed and held her hand until she died.

During this entire crisis, our hospital personnel and chaplains spent significant time in rooms of COVID-19 patients. Without visitors or limited visitations, family members unable to be with lonely patients, suffer like their loved ones, especially dying individuals. We become the extension of family and try to connect patients and families by using iPads, iPhones and Zoom. As chaplains, in addition to our responsibility for the care of patients and families, we are also responsible for offering caring support to staff. In addition to the sufferings placed on patients and families, COVID-19 it as taken a terrible toll on nurses, doctors, the cooking and cleaning staff, and their families. The pandemic has restricted and discontinued or the present time previous events to support staff. Our chaplains offer now creative support, through an Instagram program in daily inspirational messages and sometimes with videos.

Initially, I responded to an invitation to serve as a chaplain at the Brigham, for an interim year, but soon I felt at home in this wonderful ministry. In the words of Frederick Buechner: “The place where God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s hunger meet.” This has been true for me as I have just completed eighteen years in this ministry. As we are experiencing now a new outbreak of the virus within the hospital, anxiety lurks with many people. The weather turns and there may be another surge with colder weather. This ministry can be stressful and tiring. Yet I am deeply blessed to know God’s call to the place where I find my own deep gladness and where I can respond to a small part of the world, hungering for connection to the sacred.

I belong to a Mental Health task force at the hospital. The management at the Brigham recognizes that attending to the spiritual needs of the whole community is a vital part of total patient, family and employee care. This responsibility calls me to reflect as a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdeN) on my ministry in health care. I am able to live out our charism in seeing the goodness of God among the people with whom I journey. I experience God’s goodness in my staff who often represent the face of God to those who are suffering, overwhelmed or dying. God’s goodness shines forth in our doctors and nurses who care with compassion for their patients. I see God’s goodness in an employee who empties my wastebasket every day, as he works the 3:30-11:00 p.m. shift after working the day shift at another hospital.

I pray to reflect God’s goodness through my ministry to all at the Brigham.
Sister Virginie has become part of their research team. In June and January, university students come to prepare for their exams. In short, “Les Pins Verts” is a place of joy where time seems to stop so that one may taste more fully the deepest values of life.

Nevertheless, the mission of Sisters Albertine and Virginie does not stop there. They are part of the parish life, especially with the groups who visit the sick and those in the chorale of the elders. During Sunday Eucharistic celebrations, they participate actively by joining their voices with the other members of the parish choir. During the week, the Sisters open their oratory to Christians for the Eucharist or personal prayer.

Near a home for the sick and elderly, the Sisters visit regularly all those who wish to receive visitors. They accompany these residents with moments of sharing and prayer. They regularly preside over Eucharistic celebrations, and bring Communion to those who are unable to leave their homes, even when there is not a Liturgy. Near the homes of sick people, the Sisters go out of their way to bring comfort and spiritual support to them. All their ministries include regular participation in days of formation, visits to the sick and liturgical sessions.

In this Thuindine Region, there are always many situations of people in distress when our Sisters provide their support in joining to bring aid with members of the Red Cross.

In the city of Thuin, the Mission of our two Sisters does not go unnoticed. They have received the support of the mayor to resume their work at “Les Pins Verts”, after the quarantine. With St. Julie, let us thank God for everything that happens in this special place.

Oh! How good is the good God!
The expression of St. Julie Billiart, “How good is the good God!” showed 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**

Sisters of Notre Dame, women with hearts as wide as the world, make known God’s goodness and love, with and among people living in poverty, through a Gospel way of life, community and prayer.

Continuing a strong educational tradition, we take our stand with people living in poverty, 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
- South Sudan
- Zimbabwe

**Asia**
- Japan

**Europe**
- Belgium
- France
- Italy
- United Kingdom

**Latin America**
- Brazil
- Nicaragua
- Peru

**North America**
- Haiti
- United States (19 states and the District of Columbia)

**Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur have gone social…**

- Facebook.com/SNDdeN
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- 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