

School Sisters of Notre Dame *Province of Africa*

GOOD NEWS FROM AFRICA



Spring 2020



In these historic times in which we are living, we are called through the power of the Spirit, to trust and dare to discover God's vision for creation and humanity. As we celebrate the Season of Pentecost we ponder the gifts of the Holy Spirit, seven spiritual gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.

As we turn to the Spirit at this time of crisis of health may we remember our brothers and sisters across the continent of Africa where medical facilities are ill-prepared to deal with Covid 19. Because many parts of Africa depend on daily procurement of food since refrigeration is very limited, stay-in-place regulations are extremely difficult for the people. The inevitable economic downturn will be an extra burden for the many poor people.

The pandemic is making the suffering of vulnerable people, the elderly, the sick, the poor and unemployed – even deeper. In the midst of loss, uncertainty, and suffering, something incredible is also happening: we are noticing the bonds which form our human family: the global suffering has made it startlingly apparent to us that we need other people and other people need us too.

In her task of evangelization, the missionary Church is often on the front lines of major threats to human well-being. In Africa alone, there are over 74,000 religious sisters and over 46,000 priests operating 7,274 hospitals and clinics, 2,346 homes for the elderly and the vulnerable, and educating over 19 million children in 45,088 primary schools. In many rural areas, they are the only providers of healthcare and education.” Cardinal Tagle, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples

Our SSNDs serving in Africa are all engaged in education and healthcare among the poor. May they know the power of the Holy Spirit as they minister in these times!

In this issue of Good News from Africa we share Mother Theresa's dream of opening missions in Africa, the New SSND Mission to South Sudan, 30 years of SSND presence in The Gambia and a request to make a gift toward finishing the Convent in Nyalieng'a. See the Matching Gift offer on page 3.



Blessed Mother Theresa's Dream for SSND Presence in Africa

The seeds of Mother Theresa's, Foundress of School Sisters of Notre Dame, dream to open a school in Sudan go back to 1858

On July 6, 1858, Mother Theresa wrote to the Royal Government of Upper Bavaria, "Approximately three years ago, some African children were brought to Bavaria in order to teach them Christianity, win them for the reign of God, and save their souls. The Poor School Sisters were asked whether they, like other convents here and abroad, would accept some of these children for the love of God. We agreed to accept seven girls. A short time later, they arrived in the most pitiful condition. The baptismal records in the church in Munich-Au gives the African names of the seven girls who stayed with our sisters, their age and place of birth, date of Baptism, baptismal names, and the names of their sponsors. The children came from various parts of Africa, including Darfur.

Most of them died within a short time, but one survived and stayed with the sisters. In a letter written in early 1859, Mother Theresa wrote, "Our physician attributes their early deaths to tuberculosis, which developed during the journey out of the tropical climate and across the sea. In any case, there is no thought of sending any more children to us." (2787) Mother Theresa recognized very soon that it would be better for the children to stay in their own homeland and receive an education there. A missionary to Africa, Fr. Knoblecher, who had accompanied these girls to Munich, began negotiations with us about an African mission of Poor School Sisters.



In 1858, Fr. Knoblecher returned to Europe and visited Mother Theresa in Munich. He died in Naples on April 13, 1858. His death not only ended negotiations about a mission of the Poor School Sisters but was also a blow to the mission stations in Sudan which closed soon after.

In 1858 on the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, on a commemorative plaque prepared for the occasion, we have a picture of a School Sister of Notre Dame with three girls, indicating the consciousness of the Sisters for Africa at the time.

After 162 years Mother Theresa's dream of serving the people of Sudan now becomes a reality!

Aware of the urgent and critical needs of South Sudan and of our desire to respond boldly, the SSND general council has confirmed the opening of an interprovincial community in Juba, South Sudan. We also continue to discern with other sisters and look forward to opening a companion mission in January 2021. Let us remember these sisters in a special way as they prepare to move to South Sudan. May they know of our love and prayerful support as they respond to this new call of the congregation.

What a wonderful way to mark 50 years of presence and service on the continent of AFRICA!



New Convent for the Sisters working in the Homa Bay Diocese of Kenya

The School Sisters of Notre Dame began the Children's Outreach Program in Nyalieng'a Parish in the Homa Bay Diocese of Kenya in September 2009. The SSNDs selected 34 of the neediest families in the area with 119 children of different ages to start what is now called Notre Dame Children Outreach (NDCO).

Most of these children are orphans due to their parents' deaths of HIV/AIDS. SSND's have been providing safe places for orphaned children to live with surviving relatives while taking care of their basic needs paying their school fees in the schools they attend while giving individual Guidance and Counselling. A helping hand is also given to guardians as needed.

Impact and Accomplishments over the years:

236 children now in the NDCO program

120 children have successfully completed their various levels of education

30 alumni now have jobs and means of livelihood

The convent for the Sisters was begun by laying of a foundation in 2017. Work has gone slowly as monies were received. We are happy to announce that a very generous donor who knows the Homa Bay Area is now providing a Matching Gift in the amount of \$15,000 to help finish the construction which includes plastering of walls, painting, tiling, instalation of electrical fixtures, landscaping and fencing. **Full cost to finish the construction is \$30,320.**

Why the Convent

1. With the increase in the orphans and vulnerable children in the NDCO project, the Sisters need a residence from which they can operate and carry out their required duties appropriately.
2. The current living space for the sisters is a rental house which requires monthly payments which in the long run in an added financial cost.
3. The state of the new house currently requires to be completed to avoid damage, especially from the weather conditions in the area since much has been put into the construction to the current level.
4. This convent will be large enough to provide housing for Sisters working in other parts of the area.

Help us smash our goal! A generous Donor will match your gift up to \$15,000 when you send your contribution by July 15, 2020. Envelope enclosed!



Srs. Rose and Mara began the Mission in 2009



Sr. Nentaweh is the new Director of NDCO

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SSND FOUNDATION IN THE GAMBIA—Celebrating 30 years

In the mid 1980s Sisters from the SSND Polish Province were invited by Bishop Michael Cleary to come and serve in the Diocese of Banjul. After a discernment process, the final decision of responding to the needs in The Gambia was made in 1989 and in January 1990, two sisters, Sr. Irene Ksiazak and Sr. Irmina Maciejowska arrived in Banjul. For a few months the sisters lived in Banjul to adjust to the new culture, climate and also to learn from other missionaries. On June 1st, 1990 the Sisters moved to the first mission in Bwiam, and four years later a new mission was opened in Soma.



On the 10th Anniversary of SSND presence in The Gambia the Sisters heartily welcomed the first Gambian Postulant Marie J. Mendy. In 2014 Sr. Marie made her perpetual profession of vows. The Polish sisters joined the District (now Province) of Africa

in 2006. The communities are multicultural, international and grounded in the African Continent. Sisters continue their service in two communities: Bwiam and Soma.

**The Sisters of the Province of Africa are deeply
grateful for your generosity in helping our missions develop.**