



School Sisters of Notre Dame

TRUST & DARE

a publication for family, friends and supporters of the School Sisters of Notre Dame



**Nourishing the
SSND charism into
the future**



Meet our sisters



**Living
the SSND
charism
as an
associate**

2022





Trust & Dare

Trust & Dare is a publication for family, friends and supporters of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in the Atlantic-Midwest Province, Central Pacific Province and Province of Africa. It is coordinated by SSND Collaborative Communications.

Editor: Christine Rasure
communications@ssnd.org

Contributors: Sister Debra Sciano,
Sister Frances Okafor, Caelie Haines,
Trudy Hamilton, Laura Lang

Follow Us

facebook.com/ssnd.northamerica 
twitter.com/school_sisters 
instagram.com/ssndsisters 
youtube.com/sistersofnotredame 

To learn more about the School Sisters of Notre Dame, visit ssnd.org.

Contact Us

Atlantic-Midwest Province
6401 North Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21212
410-377-7774
communications@amssnd.org

Central Pacific Province
320 East Ripa Avenue
St. Louis, MO 63125
314-633-7012
communications@ssndcp.org

Province of Africa
School Sisters of Notre Dame
PMB Achimoto School Post Office
Accra, Ghana
ssndafrica2@gmail.com
or
Province of Africa Development Office
P.O. Box 16415
St. Louis, MO 63125
314-633-7051
ssndafrica@gmail.com

Dear Friends,

We, as School Sisters of Notre Dame, have been called to carry forward what was begun by Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger, by living out our mission to bring all to that oneness for which Jesus Christ was sent into the world. We have done that faithfully and with great fervor since we were founded in Germany in 1833, consistently responding to urgent needs in five continents. We have ministered to and been transformed by thousands of our sisters and brothers as educators, advocates for peace, justice and the integrity of creation, spiritual leaders and in many other professions.

Over the years, we have learned the importance of collaboration with others in living out our mission, which has become even more critical as our sisters increase in age and new members are less frequent. We feel deeply blessed to be in relationship with those who share our mission, values and the spirit of our founders.

This issue of *Trust and Dare* will explore ways in which our collaborative relationships with associates and ministries help carry the essence, ideals and educational vision of SSND into the future. You will have the opportunity to hear from three of our ministries about how they partner with the School Sisters of Notre Dame to serve unmet needs in their communities.

In addition, you will get an inside look at community life for the School Sisters of Notre Dame as you meet our sisters in Peace River, Alberta; Makeni, Sierra Leone; Douglas, Arizona; and the international novitiate in Rome, Italy.

We hope you also enjoy special features about the important work of Sister Beatriz Martinez-Garcia at the United Nations and our congregational commitment to *Laudato Si'*.

Our life is about building community and joining those of great diversity, while staying committed to struggle together for interculturality and unity in a divided world. It is with great joy and gratitude that we do that with our colleagues and friends across the globe, standing together to bring love, peace, healing and hope to those to whom we are sent.

With peace and blessings,

Sister Debra Sciano

Sister Debra M. Sciano
Provincial Leader,
Central Pacific Province



Your Support Influences Positive Change

As the needs in our society continue to change, the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) find new ways to partner and build community with others who share our common beliefs, interests and goals. Living with change and uncertainty has become the norm during these last two years of the pandemic, and that has made these relationships even more essential to the work that our sisters continue to do each and every day.



Collaborating with others and being involved with the larger community are ways to be part of something greater than ourselves. It gives us a sense of empowerment, and when people feel empowered, they can influence positive change. You are our partners in the SSND community. Your prayers and generosity continue to sustain the SSND mission and its ministries and bring positive change throughout the United States and Africa.

Sister Nancy McNemar (left) and Donna Murrell (right) at the Mass of Appreciation at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Covington, Louisiana.

As an international community, SSND is constantly presented with opportunities to look beyond itself for ways to unify and serve God's people. Your support helps to:

- ▶ Strengthen the SSND educational ministries – educational and ministry formation programs that sustain the SSND charism, values and mission to deliver quality services to individuals and communities in need.
- ▶ Support justice, peace and care of creation – allows SSND to focus on important social justice issues in an effort to answer urgent needs, advocate for peace and nonviolence, and promote responsible care for creation. SSND strives to create a global community where human dignity is respected, all creation is treasured, spirituality is nourished and justice is accomplished as part of the mission to show God's love to the world.
- ▶ Care for our aging sisters.

There are many ways you can support SSND. If you would like to learn more, please contact your Development Director listed on the right.

We remain grateful that you continue to be a part of our SSND community.

SSND Development Directors

Laura Lang
Atlantic-Midwest Province
410-377-7774 XII54
llang@amssnd.org

Mary Kay Murray
Central Pacific Province
262-787-1037
mmurray@ssndcp.org

Sister Rosanne Rustemeyer
Province of Africa
314-633-7051
ssndafrica@gmail.com



Students join Sisters Gladys Courtade (left) and Marianne Kempa (fourth from left) in displaying Notre Dame School of Milwaukee's sponsored ministry certificate.

“We are 98% Hispanic in terms of school population, and 95% of our families fall below the poverty line,” said school president Patrick Landry. “Despite our demographic challenges, 99% of our kids are graduating from high school in a city where the high school graduation rate is 63%.”

NOURISHING THE SSND CHARISM INTO THE FUTURE

School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) have responded to urgent needs in their communities for more than 185 years. As time passes and sisters transition to new roles, the role of lay people continues to grow. This has allowed SSND to partner with a variety of organizations and institutions that embrace the mission and heritage of SSND. These relationships continue to nourish and sustain the SSND charism into the future, finding new ways to share the SSND gifts.

SSND Education Is Transforming Lives In Milwaukee

Notre Dame School of Milwaukee began as a middle school in 1996 after the School Sisters of Notre Dame recognized the need to offer a quality Catholic education to young girls in the impoverished areas of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Since that time, the institution has continued to evolve to address unmet needs. Today, the school has grown to include an early childhood program, co-ed elementary school and all-boys middle school, serving 600 students in grades K-8 on multiple campuses.

What sets Notre Dame School of Milwaukee apart from other schools are the innovative solutions teachers and leadership have developed to meet student needs.

Some of the school's most impactful offerings happen outside traditional classroom time in after-school programs, summer school and camp, and even a graduate support program that continues to assist students throughout their high school years.

In addition to financial hardships, many of the students at Notre Dame School of Milwaukee do not speak English as a first language.

“We've been having a lot of recent immigrants from Central and South America,” Landry noted. “They don't speak English at all, but we have an innovative dual-language program where students are learning English and Spanish. That has really helped them feel at home.”

Woven into the fabric of the entire Notre Dame School of Milwaukee experience is the charism and values of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. While laity has since taken over the day-to-day operations of the school, there remains a strong SSND presence throughout the institution's culture and campuses. For starters, two sisters continue to minister as full-time staff members: Sisters Gladys Courtade and Marianne Kempa.


“Shortly after I started at the school, one of the little kids said ‘Oh, you're a School Sister of Notre Dame!’” Sister Marianne recalled with a smile. “I was wearing my [SSND] pin, so they made that connection.”

In addition, many School Sisters of Notre Dame who live nearby are often present at fundraisers, graduation and other school events. There are also annual student

awards named in honor of SSND foundress Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger, and Mother Caroline Friess, who was instrumental in the congregation's expansion in North America. When students had to stay home during the coronavirus pandemic, still the school found ways to keep SSND at the center of its education.

"During the coronavirus, while students were learning from home, the school still wanted the sisters to be very present," said Sister Marianne. "So, I helped orchestrate 'faith-filled Fridays' and asked a different sister to write a prayer every Friday. It was another way in which the School Sisters of Notre Dame could stay in touch with our school population."

During the school's 26 years of existence, more than 700 students have graduated from its halls. Each child is nurtured in a quality Catholic education steeped in the gifts and charism of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

"What matters is that there are people – faculty, staff, volunteers, committees – that are willing to invest their time and energy for [the SSND] tenets," said Sister Marianne. "They value the SSND education so much that they are willing to make it a priority. I think the [SSND] legacy, history and spirit continues to live on through all of the people that we work with and serve through the school." 

Second Chances | *One way the School Sisters of Notre Dame express their mission of unity is to enable people to reach the fullness of their potential. Sometimes, as is the case at SisterHouse in Chicago, Illinois, that means giving a second chance to reach that potential. SisterHouse offers a temporary home to women seeking recovery from substance abuse. Its programs aim to break the cycle of addiction, homelessness, unemployment, hopelessness and poverty by enabling residents to become psychologically and economically self-sufficient.*

"I serve on the board because I love that SisterHouse is about second chances," said board president Tiffany Harrison. "I'm very impressed by people who are starting a journey of sobriety. I don't think a lot of adults actually have the courage to say, 'I made a mistake in my life, and I am publicly going to say I'm going to change it.' I want to help anybody who is that brave; I want to be there to support them."

Sister Carol Dwyer is a volunteer at SisterHouse and also serves on the board. "I have enjoyed this ministry as it is so meaningful and challenging, as well as fulfilling. There's a mutuality in this service. We bless one another. The honesty, openness, and vulnerability are often what inspire me and touch me the most. In [the women's] willingness to share their lives, their struggles, their pain, I see a fierce beauty in their transparency. I sense they know that their lives depend on this – their willingness to reach out, support and depend


on one another, and the sisterhood that they build. It is so beautiful and such a blessing to be included in this support."

Prior to ministering at SisterHouse, Sister Carol had been a chaplain counselor in addictions treatment. "To use these skills learned for the women at SisterHouse is such a privilege, for SisterHouse's mission and vision resonate with the mission, ministry and charism of SSND. Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger founded the congregation to help women and girls use their gifts to create a better world. SSND educate for transformation, and women at SisterHouse are gifted with the opportunity to transform their lives and move toward the fulfillment of their God-given potential."

SisterHouse can accommodate up to 16 residents and women typically stay 18-24 months. During that time, they work on the 12-step recovery program, attend

counseling, learn life skills and job training and continually evolve into the person God created them to be.

Of the women who arrive at SisterHouse, 91% are homeless and more than 60% have no high school diploma or GED. Securing employment and saving money toward a place of their own are important milestones in the final phase of the program.

"I think supporting women is a wonderful thing to do," said Harrison. "We help women restart their lives. Many of these women have families, so we're not just helping them, we're helping their whole family. We're really changing not one life, but multiple lives." 



Sister Carol Dwyer is a board member and volunteer counselor at SisterHouse in Chicago, Illinois.

Following The SSND Example

When it was time for Nkiruka Geraldine to consider a future career choice, she had to look no further than the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) guiding and challenging her at Notre Dame Secondary School (NDSS) in Mkar, Benue State, Nigeria. Geraldine followed their example and became a teacher, ready to be that same positive influence for the next generation of girls. The 2007 NDSS graduate is one of six former students now teaching at her alma mater, educating young girls in the same classrooms she once sat.

“I was deeply inspired by the example of the sisters,” said Geraldine, who teaches grade seven business education and grades 10-12 marketing. “I even thought about becoming a SSND, but instead I decided to become a teacher. I felt the need to give back what I received. I wanted to continue advancing the charism of the School Sisters of Notre Dame by enabling young women to attain the best of their potential. I

saw it as another way of becoming a School Sister of Notre Dame.”

Giving back is a common theme among alumnae. Boikyaa Patience, who graduated from NDSS in 2005, teaches prevocational studies and catering. For Patience, teaching at NDSS is a way to show her appreciation for what the school helped her to accomplish. “What made NDSS a great place to learn was that we were taught to be responsible, self-disciplined, diligent and confident in ourselves. There were so many things I enjoyed about the school, such as the high academic standards, small class sizes and supportive environment that ensured each student was inspired to reach her full potential.”

The supportive environment is something about which Geraldine wholeheartedly agrees.

“The staff members were always willing to sacrifice so much for us,” Geraldine recalled. “Sister Regina Oluoh would spend her leisure time in the evenings to hold

extra lessons in literature with us. [The sisters] embodied our school motto of goodness, truth and beauty and ensured we weren’t anything less. The sisters modeled to us by their character what we should be – peaceful, gentle ladies and strong builders of homes,




Boikyaa Patience is a teacher at her alma mater, Notre Dame Secondary School.

nations and God’s kingdom, just as we sing in our school anthem.”

Notre Dame Secondary School was established in 1996 by the then-Baltimore Province. The school opened its doors in September that year with Sister Margaret (Peg) Malone as the pioneer principal. In the beginning, NDSS was established as a day school. Over the years, the school experienced tremendous growth and eventually transformed into a boarding school. Today, the school has a population of more than 750 girls.

The school’s proud history is one that Geraldine and her fellow alumnae are passionate about upholding.

“What makes Notre Dame Secondary School special is its emphasis on the wholistic education of the girl child, of which I am a beneficiary,” said Geraldine. “I hope to continue forming the hearts of young girls to make them conscientious and compassionate individuals, able women, great entrepreneurs and responsible leaders.” 



Nkiruka Geraldine (second from left), pictured with (left to right) Sisters Priscilla Onwuka, Regina Oluoh and Stella Anyanwu, is a teacher at her alma mater, Notre Dame Secondary School in Mkar, Nigeria.



Associates from New York, New Jersey and Connecticut gathered at St. Luke's Church in Westport, Connecticut, to celebrate their covenant renewals.

Living The SSND Charism As An Associate

Associates are women and men in whom the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) charism has found a home. Though they are inspired by the spirit of SSND foundress Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger, associates do not take vows to live a consecrated life as a religious. Instead, associates enter into a formal relationship with the SSND community in the form of a covenant – a promise to live the spirit and mission of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in their everyday lives. Associates come from all walks of life, but they find commonality in their commitment to join the efforts of sisters for mission, ministry, spirituality and social justice advocacy.

More than 40 years ago, six women were accepted as the first associates of SSND in North America. Since that time, hundreds of women and men in the Atlantic-Midwest and Central Pacific provinces and the Province of Africa have embraced the call to use their own gifts to advance the SSND mission by joining the associate program.



Who Can Be An Associate?

Women and men are invited to join the associate program. Participants must be 21 years of age or older, committed to the School Sisters of Notre Dame charism and wish to further the SSND mission.

Associate Norma Struempf (left) thanks Sister Kathy Schmittgens during Catholic Sisters Week.

What Associates Do

Through this faith journey, associates and sisters develop a mutually enriching spiritual relationship. Together they pray, reflect, discern and find ways to respond to critical needs in the world today.

Below are just some of the ways associates live out the SSND charism in their own lives and share it in their local communities:

- ▶ **Columbia, Missouri:** A group of associates initiated a racial justice program in their parish to educate and invite others to the work of dismantling racism.
- ▶ **St. Jacobs, Ontario:** Pat Storz serves alongside sisters on the Addressing Climate Change Committee.
- ▶ **Sunyani, Ghana:** Cynthia Frompomaa participates in a local Shalom club to help educate young women about the importance of caring for our earth and other issues of justice throughout the world.
- ▶ **Baltimore, Maryland:** Teresa Ichniowski volunteers as a reading tutor for elementary students.
- ▶ **Nago City, Okinawa, Japan:** Hastuko Ikema runs a free children's cafeteria for those who do not have access to regular healthy meals.

Learn more about the associate program at ssnd.org/partner-us/associate.

Life In Rural Canada

When you first meet Sisters Connie Harkin and Mary Jeanne Davidson, it instantly feels like you're catching up with old friends. As they sit in front of the computer from their living room, their gentle kindness and happiness is obvious. It's easy to understand how the sisters have faithfully moved from city to city as School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND), always going wherever there was a need, which is exactly how they found themselves in the Peace River region of Alberta, Canada.



Sister Connie Harkin (left) and Our Lady of Peace Church's Father Nel Esguerra (center) helped Sister Mary Jeanne Davidson celebrate her 60th jubilee.

"We are blessed to live in such a neighborhood," said Sister Connie.

But while the setting looks idyllic, Peace River does have its challenges with substance abuse and poverty widespread. And, like everywhere else in the world, the coronavirus continues to impact their daily ministries. Though the sisters can't always be physically present to minister to others, they continue to keep a strong prayerful presence.

For Sister Mary Jeanne, getting the call to serve in Peace River "was the happiest day of my life." Before relocating to western Canada, she was a pastoral assistant in Waterdown, Ontario. "I knew inside me there was a fire and love that had been there when I was on mission a number of years earlier," said Sister Mary Jeanne, referring to her mission in Peru from 1978-84. "I kept longing to be among the marginalized and the poor in our world."

That opportunity came when SSND was asked to open a mission in the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan in 2002. Since that time, Sister Mary Jeanne has served as a presence of Church among the Indigenous communities there, visiting families, attending to the sick and imprisoned and participating at Eucharist. In 2012, she even made a pilgrimage to Rome with Native members of the Cadotte Lake community for the canonization of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha. "That's when I learned

the true depth of the spirituality of the people I was with," said Sister Mary Jeanne.


Sister Connie came to form community with Sister Mary Jeanne in Peace River in 2018. Her 40 years as a teacher in Canada and England had instilled a lifelong love of learning, so she was well-equipped to wear many hats and pitch in with anything and everything at Our Lady of Peace Church just down the road. Sister Connie is involved in Catholic Women's League and in 2020, she offered to assist the Director of Evangelization and Catechesis. She has discovered unexpected energy through this new ministry. Most recently, Sister Connie was invited to "woman the fort" while the director is away.

The sisters' house is one street away from the Peace River, surrounded by welcoming neighbors and visiting wildlife – deer, occasional moose, squirrels, chipmunks and a variety of birds.

"There is a call to awaken the faith everywhere," said Sister Mary Jeanne. "We take time in prayer to light a candle and send light into the world to the struggling families and global needs."

While the coronavirus has impacted nearly every aspect of people's lives, the sisters have found silver linings.

"One of the beneficial things that came from the pandemic is we have been able to communicate with our sisters and others this way," said Sister Connie, pointing to the computer. "Our province holds online prayer services for big celebrations like feast days, so we're present for those through Zoom or Skype. These are good ways to keep visibly connected with our AM Province and the world."

As for figuring out the different time zones, however, they're still trying to find the silver lining in that. 

Life At The Novitiate

All women discerning religious life with the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) take a slightly different path depending on their personal inner journey, profession and the structure of her home province. One program that remains the same for all SSND is the novitiate – the heart and center of initial formation. Once a woman completes the affiliation and postulancy steps (sometimes referred to as candidature), she becomes a novice for two years.

SSND has one congregational novitiate located in Rome, Italy. Novices from provinces all over the world arrive at the novitiate at the same time to spend their first year, the canonical year, living together in community under the guidance of novice directors Sister Mara Frundt and Sister

Monika Ulrik. Also living in the novitiate community are Sisters Zipporah Marigwa and Ana Helena Rochembach.

This past spring, 10 novices completed their canonical year in Rome. The women came from Hungary, Kenya, Nigeria and Ghana. Obviously, language barriers can be difficult to overcome, but this also creates opportunities to grow in other ways.

“Struggling to overcome language barriers brings many gifts,” said Sister Mara. Sister Monika added, “To read the Gospel and *You Are Sent* in another language opens up fresh or deeper meanings of the content. And the ongoing clarification helps community building. Surely, love motivates us to keep on learning both language and matters of the heart that can be communicated without language. This language of the heart is the most important.”


During the novitiate, women in formation seek to deepen their relationship with Christ and get to know more fully the various aspects of SSND life. A day at the novitiate always includes morning and evening prayer together, as well as daily Mass. A novice’s day can also include:

- ▶ Classes where they study the SSND Constitution and General Directory (*You Are Sent*), Scripture, Shalom (justice, peace and integrity of creation), theology, and encyclicals such as *Fratelli Tutti* or *Laudato Si’*
- ▶ Pilgrimages to sacred places around Rome
- ▶ Service to the community
- ▶ Workshops with novices from other congregations
- ▶ Household chores
- ▶ Gardening, art, practicing instruments



Sisters Monika Ulrik (left) and Mara Frundt have served as novice directors since February 2021.

After a year learning and studying in Rome, novices head back to their home provinces for the six-month apostolic phase. The focus of this time is to foster within the novice the basic attitudes that characterized Jesus in mission. The women then return to Rome for four months of continued classes and preparation for their first profession of vows. This profession makes them School Sisters of Notre Dame.

Sisters Mara and Monika find as much joy in the novitiate program as the participants, saying, “We really enjoy companioning the young in their search for God and God’s will for them in life. Also, of course, this includes our own sharing of life in SSND, and our faith, values and ongoing search. We experience much joy in their fresh, young energy and enthusiasm about contributing positively to love in this world.” 

Life At The Border

The Sonoran Desert, nestled in the southeast corner of Arizona, is a challenging environment of blistering hot days and chilly nights, mountainous terrain and dangerous animals. These obstacles make for a perilous journey for migrants, who are often unprepared for such hazards as they make their way toward the U.S.-Mexico border. Tragically, since the year 2000, nearly 4,000 men, women and children have lost their lives crossing Arizona deserts.

In 2010, Sisters Judy Bourg and Lucy Nigh answered the call for a new School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) border outreach ministry in Douglas, Arizona. Since that time, they have been dedicated to helping migrant travelers desperate for a better life, remembering those who lost their lives on that journey and advocating for immigration system reform.


During their 12 years in Douglas, no two days have been alike. “Since we continue to meet new opportunities for service, and with the immigration and deportation policies constantly changing, our responses to border needs bring us into new opportunities,” said Sister Judy. “We are always adjusting and learning along the way.”

The sisters’ ministry includes volunteering at the migrant humanitarian aid center just on the other side of the border in Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico. Shifts are especially busy now during this time of Title 42 expulsions, with the center sometimes seeing upwards of 200 people in a 24-hour period. Here, the sisters

respond to immediate needs such as food, water and medical attention. They also talk with migrants to answer questions and often provide a clean change of clothes to replace what has been torn or lost.

Constantly adapting to border needs over the years has led the sisters to outreach at migrant shelters in both Mexico and the U.S., coordinating the placement of memorial crosses to honor those who have died in the desert, supporting a women’s sewing and gardening cooperative, helping to establish a migrant carpenter school and business, and even prison ministry.

Sister Lucy recognizes that immigration can be a polarizing topic. For SSND, however, serving immigrant communities has been a part of our makeup since the congregation was founded in 1833. While people migrate for a variety of reasons, School Sisters of Notre Dame continue to stand in unity, support and love with their immigrant sisters and brothers.

“Jesus’ message to all of his followers is that we love all – our neighbors, those on the margins, even our enemies – along with our family, friends and those who share our values,” explained Sister Lucy. “Being from Wisconsin, I had, and still have, much to learn about my white privilege and how to serve humbly. What strengthens me in this service is all that I receive in inspiration from the stories of those I meet – their dedication, love and sacrifice for family, as well as the suffering that brings them to the border.” 



Sisters Lucy Nigh (left) and Judy Bourg participate in the Migrant Trail each year. This 75-mile, week-long walk near Tucson, Arizona, brings attention to the severe risks migrants face when crossing the border.

Search For A Sister

Has your life been impacted by a School Sister of Notre Dame? Maybe a former teacher or an old friend? We are happy to try and connect you with a sister! Simply fill out our online form at ssnd.org/search-for-a-sister.



(Left to right) Sisters Janet Ugbene Odey, Juliana Awuor Wangao, Regina Oluoh Ginikachi, Ndukeobong Clement Umoren and Magdalene Philip Umoh live in community together in Makeni, Sierra Leone.

Meet Our Sisters

Sisters today continue to minister wherever there are urgent needs. They form local communities of sisters that can vary in size from two to 20. In the bustling city of Makeni, Sierra Leone, five School Sisters of Notre Dame have lived in community together since October 2021.

Through prayer, group meals, sharing responsibilities around the house, creating time for recreation, reconciling and forgiving each other, and celebrating life's joys and sorrows together, the sisters promote community and prayer among each other.

Want to meet more SSND?

Visit ssnd.org/about-us/meet-our-sisters where a new sister is featured each month!

➤ **Sister Ndukeobong Clement Umoren** became a SSND on July 4, 2015.

- In my current ministry, I am head of administration at Caritas Makeni.
- During my free time, I read, write, listen to music, dance and watch movies.
- I was inspired to become a SSND because I greatly admired people committed to serving God and humanity. While at Notre Dame High School, I was inspired by the SSND's passionate commitment to their work, their love for us and the generous mentorship they offered.

➤ **Sister Regina Oluoh Ginikachi** became a SSND on May 4, 1996.

- In my current ministry, I am director of exams at the University of Makeni.
- My favorite Blessed Theresa quote is, "All the works of God proceed slowly and in pain; but then, their roots are the sturdier and their flowering the lovelier." (Letter #2277, October 4, 1856)
- What I love most about being a SSND is our life in mission. Each sister strives to contribute her own creativity to the building of unity, which is where the beauty lies.

➤ **Sister Janet Ugbene Odey** became a SSND on July 11, 2009.

- In my current ministry, I am the development and program planning officer and secretary to the vice chancellor at the University of Makeni.
- During my free time, I play music and dance, and watch or listen to the news in order to follow world events. I enjoy traveling, cooking, reading, baking, cleaning, singing and watching educational movies.
- What I love most about being a SSND is our passion for educating and empowering others, especially women and children, to reach the fullness of their potential.

➤ **Sister Magdalene Philip Umoh** became a SSND on July 6, 2013.

- In my current ministry, I serve as head of the Public Health Department and also the campus administrator for University of Makeni, Yoni campus.
- What I love most about being a SSND is that I can partner with other women across the world to be in loving service to God and all of God's creation.
- I was inspired to become a SSND because of our sisters at Notre Dame Girls Secondary School, Urua Edet Obo, Nigeria. I was inspired by their spirit of simplicity and welcoming, and their joyful presence.

➤ **Sister Juliana Awuor Wangao** became a SSND on July 4, 2015.

- In my current ministry, I am a medical laboratory technician and work in public health-epidemiology.
- During my free time, I dance to music, meditate, tidy my room, listen to tutorials and perform cognitive exercises on positive imagination.
- What I love most about being a SSND is the call to simplicity in all parts of our lives. I also love the flexibility, contemplative life, diversity in our ministries and community life.



Empowering Women And Girls Through The UN

This past March, hundreds gathered virtually and in-person for the 66th Commission of the Status on Women (CSW66), an initiative of the United Nations (U.N.). CSW is committed to promoting gender equality throughout the world and setting global policies that lead to equal rights and empowerment of women and girls. The priority theme of CSW66 was achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, and environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programs.


Climate change certainly has devastating effects for all of us, but unfortunately women and girls are disproportionately affected by its long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns.

“Women and girls are often responsible for gathering and producing food, fetching water and obtaining fuel for heating and cooking,” explained Sister Beatriz Martinez-Garcia, the SSND non-governmental organization (NGO) representative at the U.N. “With climate change, issues such as droughts and floods make these tasks for women and girls ever more difficult. Since 70% of the world’s poor are women, they are often forced to migrate to unknown places, losing their homes, livelihood and what is familiar for them.”

When the CSW66 Agreed Conclusions were unveiled at the end of the commission, Sister Beatriz was thankful to see paragraph No. 26 specifically admit that climate change and environmental degradation caused by natural disasters often result in loss of homes and livelihoods, thus making women and girls more vulnerable to become homeless. Even more significant about the conclusions, however, is it’s the first time CSW recognized the connection between climate change and gender equality.

“Recognizing that there is a connection between climate change and gender equality is important because that concern will factor into the planning, formulation and implementation of policies, including climate change mitigation and adaptation measures,” said Sister Beatriz.

CSW is just one of many U.N. events Sister Beatriz participates in each year. She works with other NGOs to bring a variety of urgent needs related to dignity of life and care for creation to the attention of the U.N. member states. In addition to issues of gender equality, she participates in U.N. events to address human trafficking, migration, social development and Indigenous peoples concerns.

“Our charism of unity implies inclusivity and respect for all peoples,” said Sister Beatriz. “The gift of our internationality sharpens our consciousness of universal needs and calls us to foster within others and ourselves a responsible concern for the people of the world.” 

Sister Beatriz Martinez-Garcia is the SSND non-governmental organization representative at the United Nations.

Non-governmental organizations (NGO) work to tackle social and human rights issues and help hold world leaders accountable for commitments toward these concerns. For the recent Commission of the Status of Women (CSW), Sister Beatriz collaborated with other NGOs to advocate for women and girls affected by homelessness brought on by climate change. Their statement to CSW66 addressed three main points:

1. Recognize homelessness as a flagrant form of poverty, which is a barrier to human rights, well-being and gender equality.
2. Identify the socioeconomic, cultural, political and environmental variables and processes that comprise the climate-homelessness-health nexus. Include women and girls in the decision-making process.
3. Accelerate the achievement of the goals of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development to eradicate poverty and enable all individuals and families to secure their human right to a home that is safe, secure and appropriate.

Laudato Si' Is About Love Of All Creation

Though God entrusted humans to be stewards of the Earth, for centuries their activity has damaged the environment. Only recently have humans come to understand that they are disrupting Earth's finely tuned balance and are, in fact, destroying the only home they have. Humanity now faces an urgent crisis. Climate change can no longer be ignored as many suffer from rising temperatures and erratic weather on an increasingly inhospitable planet.

Contemplating the urgency of Earth's crisis, Pope Francis wrote the encyclical *Laudato Si'* to bring the crisis to the attention of the worldwide human community. Pope Francis urges "every person on the planet" to see the intrinsic relatedness of all creation, all species, as well as the interrelated causes of a suffering Earth and a suffering humanity. He writes, "We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature." (LS 139)

The School Sisters of Notre Dame's *Laudato Si'* commitment is not a new direction. Their participation builds upon actions SSND have already taken and deepens the desire and commitment to live ever more simply, responsibly and sustainably. Ultimately, it is about love of God, love of neighbor and love of all God's creation.

The Call To Ecological Conversion

At the heart of *Laudato Si'* is a call to each person to undergo the process of ecological conversion. Adopting eco-friendly policies and practices will always be essential, but without the deeper work of ecological conversion – acknowledging one's own contribution to the social and ecological crisis and acting in ways that foster healing and renewal – these efforts will be limited and short-lived.

7 Laudato Si' Goals

These holistic goals reflect the gamut of Catholic social teaching:

1. Response to cry of the earth
2. Response to cry of the poor
3. Ecological economics
4. Adoption of sustainable lifestyles
5. Ecological education
6. Ecological spirituality
7. Community resilience and empowerment

SSND Public Commitment Statement, May 2021

Seeing themselves as one with all of creation and attentive to the ecological and humanitarian crisis facing us at this time, School Sisters of Notre Dame accepted Pope Francis' invitation to become a *Laudato Si'* Congregation.

"The Triune God impels us into the heart of the world to be women of peace, hope and love. As a Laudato Si' congregation, we embark on a seven-year journey toward an integral ecology. In fidelity to our charism and the mission to bring all to oneness, we commit to live more simply, responsibly and sustainably and to Educate, Advocate and Act in collaboration with others for the dignity of life and the care of all creation. Called to live our mission prophetically, we School Sisters of Notre Dame live and minister with the conviction that the world can be changed through the transformation of persons."

SSND Invites You On This Journey

How are you practicing sustainability in your own life? Share your efforts with SSND at communications@ssnd.org.

Sign up for the SSND Shalom Newsletter to stay informed and learn ways to take action: ssnd.org/shalom/jpic-newsletter



School Sisters of Notre Dame

in prayer, ministry and community



Sister Margaret Bauer celebrated her 103rd birthday on March 15. She is currently the oldest sister in the Atlantic-Midwest Province.



Sister Magdalene Akpan inspects the notebooks of her grade six students at Hillside International School in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.



(L to R): Ukrainian natives, Roman Kovbasnyk and Dr. Nataliya Danylkova, introduced by Sister Marion Welter (at podium), gave a presentation to sisters at Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mankato, Minnesota.



Sister Rosemarie Nassif, executive director of the Center for Catholic Education at the School of Education, Loyola Marymount University, received the Leonard F. DeFiore Parental Choice Advocate Award presented by the National Catholic Education Association.



Sister Janet Disbrow reflects on a centerpiece of spiritual remembering of Indigenous people during their visit to Pope Francis, who apologized for the “deplorable” abuses they suffered in Canada’s Catholic-run residential schools.



The School Sisters of Notre Dame accept the President's Award of Distinction from Mount Mary University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.



(L to R): Sisters Nancy Gilchrist, Rita O'Rourke and Charmaine Krohe react to a participant's successful roll during an indoor bowling activity at Villa Assumpta in Baltimore, Maryland.



Sister Mildred Loddeke shares lunch with a nun buddy from Notre Dame High School in St. Louis, Missouri.



Sister Nentaweh Wakger helps prepare a community meal for the Notre Dame Children's Outreach Program in Nyalieng'a, Kenya.



Sister Emilia Agana teaches her students about growth and development in flowering plants during an integrated science class at Notre Dame Girls Senior High School in Fiapre, Sunyani, Ghana.



Sister Esther Alaam provides health education with a pregnant mother at Notre Dame Clinic in Adoagyri, Ghana.



Sister Rose Cecile Espinos (right) was delighted to have Sister Martin Radež, General Council, visit Marian Village in Chicago, Illinois, in April 2022.



School Sisters
of Notre Dame



Creating A Culture Of Vocation

Discovering God's will for your life – your vocation – is a process. It is not just one decision, but a collection of decisions that leads to peace and joy in your heart.

Listening for God's voice in the big and small moments of life, we hear God's invitation to use our gifts and life experiences for the greater good. Vocation ministry, then, is assisting and supporting young people in discovering their gifts, recognizing the needs of the world around them and determining where they can most fully and authentically share their gifts in the service of others. This ministry is a service to young people and to the Church. "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet," said Frederick Buechner, theologian.

We can all become "vocation promoters" by creating a culture of vocation - an atmosphere in our families and among our friends, in our parishes and our workplaces, in whatever communities we are a part of - where listening for God's call is the norm. This culture of vocation is rooted in our baptismal identity of the universal call to holiness, where discernment of God's call and our response to it becomes the air we breathe in our homes, our schools and our parishes.

Pope Francis, in remarks made during a general audience on April 27, 2022, encouraged gathering young and older people together to talk and connect, creating a "bridge that we have to reestablish more strongly," because it is through this connection that salvation, hope and joy flow. Even for those for whom "God language" may not be comfortable, we can encourage that inner search of finding a place of purpose: Be something only you can be. Do something only you can do.

How might you personally engage in creating and nurturing a culture of vocation and accompany the young people in your life to listen for God's call?



The SSND North American Vocation Team is available to assist with the process of discernment or creating a culture of vocation. Feel free to contact us at sisters@ssnd.org or visit ssnd.org for more resources.