School Sisters of Notre Dame

TRUST & DARE

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

In this issue:

- Centers for immigrants endeavor to educate and empower
- SSND partners in ministry carry on the charism
- Catholic and Muslim communities come together in love

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.

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On the Cover Sister Bernadette Alfieri teaches introductory English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) at SSND Educational Center, a ministry of the Atlantic-Midwest Province of the School Sisters of Notre Dame that provides educational opportunities for women in Queens, New York.

Dear Friends,

As School Sisters of Notre Dame, we are called to direct our entire lives toward that oneness for which Jesus Christ was sent into the world. That is our mission – to bring all to oneness with God and to recognize each day that Christ is the center of our community and the source of our unity. (*You Are Sent*, C 4, 6)

So, what does that mean and how do we go about doing that, especially at a time when we are more divided, polarized, and partisan in our beliefs than ever before?

First, I suggest we consider what unity is not. It is not uniformity, striving to be the same, or even live out the Gospel message, emulating the life of Jesus, in the same way. No, God created each one of us to uniquely be our own person, made in God's image. We say in SSND language that we strive for unity in diversity, which suggests an openness to differences among us, acknowledging the singular gifts and make-up of each one, and the inclusion of all at the table.

When we hear the words, "one heart and one mind" it might be tempting to take that literally, but, for me, it is a mandate to accept our oneness as sisters and brothers throughout the world, including the whole of creation. If that is the case, then aren't we expected to create community together? To accept our humanity and realize we will need to forgive and be forgiven, to reconcile with those with whom we might be at odds, and to enter into true dialogue again and again?

Unity transcends superficial differences, recognizing the inherent dignity and worth of every individual. It is rooted in the understanding that, despite our diverse backgrounds, we share common human experiences and aspirations. This perspective encourages empathy, compassion, collaboration, and cooperation, paving the way for collective growth and mutual respect.

The concept of unity in diversity highlights that while differences exist, they do not diminish our shared humanity. Instead, they contribute to a more vibrant, harmonious and resilient society, challenging whatever stereotypes and biases that might exist. In the end, the call is clearly to love, to recognize God as our Source of Love, and to love one another, united in the richness of our diversity.

S. Deb Sciano

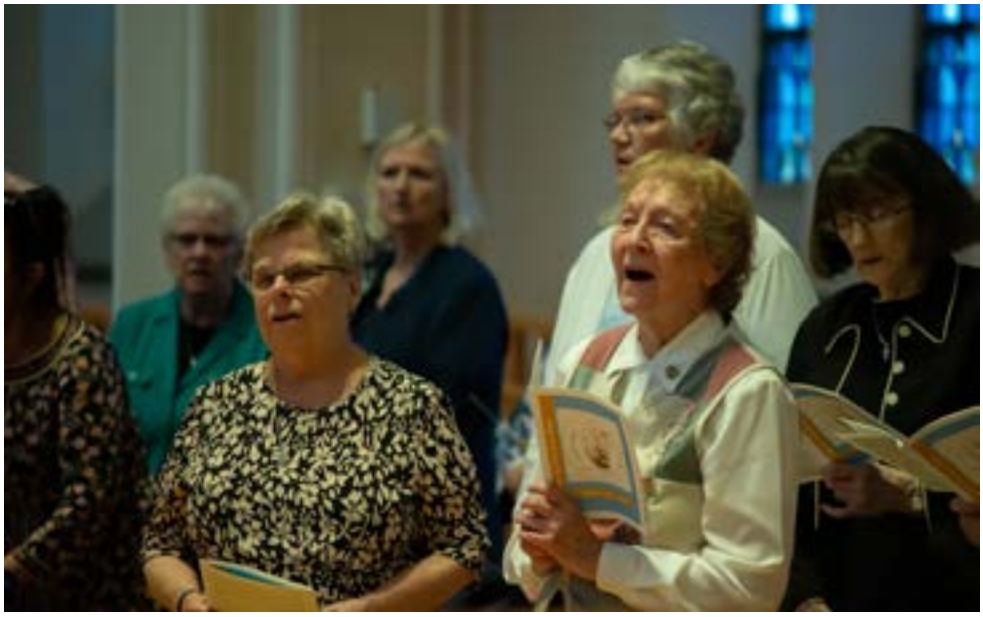
Sister Deb Sciano
Provincial Leader, Central Pacific Province, School Sisters of Notre Dame

WE STRIVE FOR UNITY in all we do

We are now well into this Holy Year of 2025 for which Pope Francis chose the theme Pilgrims of Hope. "For Christians hope is not a 'happy ending' but rather, a promise, the Lord's promise, to be welcomed here and now in our world of suffering and sighs," Pope Francis said.

This jubilee celebration of hope is kindred to the unity we seek in our world today. For School Sisters of Notre Dame, our founding charism (gift of the Holy Spirit) is the striving for unity. Our mission is to proclaim the good news directing our entire lives toward that oneness for which Jesus Christ was sent. (John 17:18, 21). Eucharist is the center of our vowed life. Striving for reconciliation and unity wherever we are, we return to the Eucharistic table with a keener awareness of our own sinfulness, of the brokenness of our world, and of the power of Christ's saving love. We are most truly who we are when we celebrate and live this sacrament of unity. (*You are Sent*, paragraph 35)

Because we are an international congregation serving in 28 countries, our internationality challenges us to witness to unity in a divided world; to discover unsuspected ways to share what we have, especially with the poor and marginalized; and to search for new channels of service in the Universal Church.



Sisters, family, and friends gather at Sancta Maria in Ripa, St. Louis, to celebrate local Jubilarians.

We minister in formal education, and we are also spiritual directors, pastoral ministers, youth ministers, and artists. We are companions to prisoners, the homeless, immigrants and refugees. We are advocates for the marginalized and much more!

We invite you to continue to partner with us in this mission. Along with God's blessing, you are the power behind what we do. As you are able, we ask that you continue to remember us with your financial support.

If you would like to discuss your commitment to SSND, please contact your provincial development director listed here.

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"Growth and success come in a variety of packages and are not always visible—not always the certificate in hand."

- Francine Poppo, SSND Educational Center executive director

Centers for immigrants endeavor to EDUCATE AND EMPOWER

Like many eager young students, Tahirah will start college this September. Unlike most co-eds, however, she will be kicking off her college career just 18 months after arriving in the United States from her native Bangladesh with a ninth-grade education.

Tahirah was 21 years old when she first set foot in the U.S. in January of 2024. Resolute in her goal to obtain an American GED, she registered for classes at SSND Educational Center in Woodhaven, NY, just three weeks later, having already passed two of the four test subjects on her own. By June of that year, she had passed a third. The final section, Reading Language Arts, proved more difficult for her; she failed twice before passing on her third try with the help of SSND Educational Center teacher Sister Cathy Feeney. Immediately upon receiving her GED, Tahirah took the next step in her journey, approaching SSND Educational Center Executive Director Francine Poppo for help in applying to college.

Tahira's determination is emblematic of the kind of tenacity required of immigrants as they navigate the many obstacles before them. To help them succeed, SSND Educational Center—a sponsored ministry of the Atlantic-Midwest Province—provides women with a range of educational services that help them jump those hurdles.

All the center's English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students are immigrants, a population with a high probability of facing housing instability, food insecurity, discrimination, and fear of deportation. In addition, many immigrant women are discouraged or even hindered by their families in their efforts to seek education.

Despite all those barriers, the women at SSND Educational Center persevere. Many students pass the center every morning as they walk their children to school, then circle back to begin their own classes; at the end of the day, they head directly to their children's school for pickup. One student, a single woman in her 20s who supports her seven-year-old

Volunteer GED math teacher Theresa Jaffe works with a student at SSND Educational Center.

niece, frequently struggles to stay awake in her GED class after working the night shift.

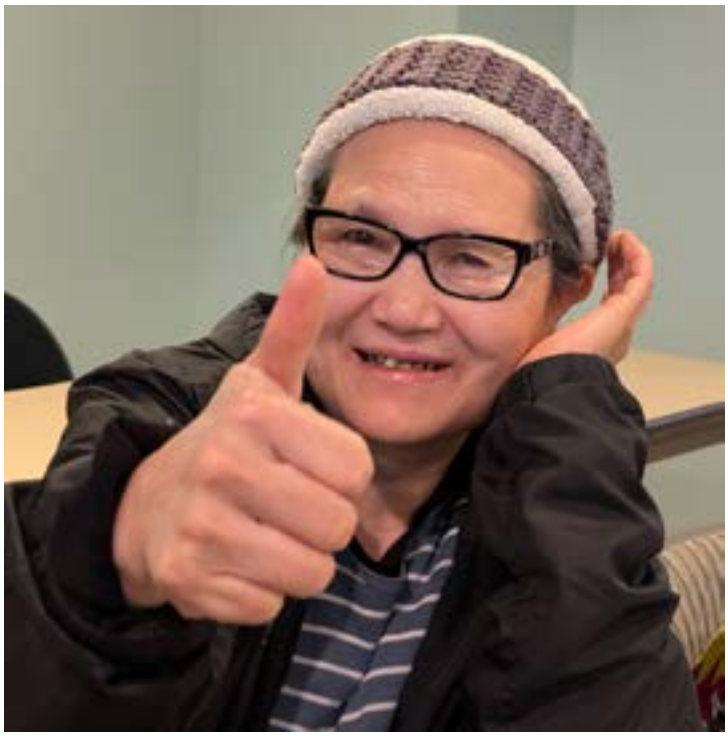
That same kind of intense resolve can be found among students at MORE, a sponsored ministry of the Central Pacific Province. Located in St. Paul, Minnesota, MORE operates primarily as an English language learning facility while also providing its clients with access to basic needs services such as free food and clothing distribution.

Situated across the street from the McDonough Housing Community, MORE serves both women and men, most of whom are refugees. The majority of students are within walking distance of the facility, but some go to great lengths to take advantage of the services MORE has to offer. One seventy-five-year-old student travels two hours by bus each morning and each afternoon to attend classes. He has worked diligently to become more proficient with English and just recently became a U.S. citizen.

Although English language instruction is MORE's bread-and-butter, they also teach civics, digital literacy, critical thinking, and GED prep. In addition, MORE works with businesses to help design curricula that are relevant for specific jobs and holds classes at job sites that regularly hire students. Such classes might focus on learning the names of fruits and vegetables, becoming familiar with the parts of circuit boards, or being trained on safety protocols for factory work.

In addition to some of the hard skills taught at MORE and SSND Educational Center, a variety of soft skills are fostered, as well. The staff at both ministries coach students on how to practice self-care, how to communicate their needs and emotions, and the importance of accountability, time management, and teamwork. They also work on building students' confidence and helping them find constructive ways to resolve conflicts. Those lessons manifest in many ways—with students beginning to show up for class more consistently and on time, assisting one another with assignments, and successfully managing difficult relationships.

"Growth and success come in a variety of packages and are not always visible—not always the certificate in hand, whether it's a GED or completion of all levels of our ESOL program," said Francine. "It also includes the small, sometimes invisible successes, the ones that build us up as individuals, as children of



(Above) Notices about opportunities, including citizenship prep classes, are posted on the bulletin board at SSND Educational Center. (Below) A student expresses her joy about being part of the MORE community.

God, as members of a family or a community, and as empowered women ready to keep doing the work."

Building community is a big part of both ministries' missions. At SSND Educational Center, students not only learn together, they also gather for daily reflection. At Thanksgiving, they share a potluck lunch to which each student brings a favorite dish to share with the larger community. Around Christmas, they come together to sing songs and reflect on the meaning of their different holy days. Throughout the year, the women celebrate one another's joys and successes and lift each other up when times are difficult.

That sense of community goes beyond current students. The center's 2023-24 cohort has stayed in close touch and has seen each other through the birth of a child, the death of a parent, a move into a homeless shelter, two home health aide certifications, two new jobs, and even a classmate in her 30s having a stroke. "Our former students contacted us to update us on these important celebrations and sad times," said Francine. "They were the ones enlisting our help for their classmates."

At MORE, many former students come back to volunteer, and an annual 5K fundraiser draws multiple generations of past students and their families. Some former students have even gone beyond volunteering, eventually moving into positions on the MORE staff.

Babita Sapkota, who serves as MORE's basic needs coordinator and office assistant, came to the United States from Nepal in 2010 knowing just three words of English. She joined her first English class at MORE in 2013 and is now a United States citizen. "When I joined MORE, the teachers were so helpful," said Babita. "They taught me how to survive, showed me how to use the bus route, how to use a map, reading, writing, speaking. They helped me understand my mail and helped me apply for health insurance."

When the basic needs coordinator position opened in 2023, a MORE teacher encouraged a reluctant

Babita Sapkota makes sure students are well-fed.

Babita to apply. "When I was hired, I was so happy!" said Babita. "Everybody's heart is beautiful at MORE."

Those beautiful hearts striving in ever-changing ways to deepen relationships of communion and transform lives through education in its broadest sense are the backbone of SSND ministries. "As our board chair Sister Kathleen Cornell always says, the SSND charism is an evolving response to the community," said Francine. "It's that sweet spot where our gifts of the Holy Spirit and our intention to respond to the needs of the community meet with the women we serve and their current needs."

Sister Cathy Feeney (second from left) founded SSND Educational Center in 2004 along with two other School Sisters of Notre Dame. She continues her involvement at the center, teaching ELA writing and citizenship prep.

Contributions by SSND to the Nun Study
CONTINUE TO BEAR FRUIT

In 1990, 678 School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) from what are now the Atlantic-Midwest and Central Pacific Provinces volunteered to participate in a study on aging, Alzheimer's, and related dementias. To take part in the study, the sisters agreed to periodic cognitive and physical assessments throughout the rest of their lives as well as brain donation at death. The endeavor was a new undertaking, but it fit seamlessly with the sisters' commitment to being educators in all they are and do.

Although all the sisters enrolled in that investigation, dubbed the Nun Study, are now deceased, the contributions of those women continue. At this year's SSND Women's Leadership Luncheons, Dr. Margaret Flanagan and Dr. Sudha Seshadri, two scientists still conducting research using the material provided by the sisters, explained what has made the Nun Study so unique and how it continues to shed light on Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.

"The Nun Study was specifically one of the first studies of its kind to require that individuals not have memory problems at the time of enrollment," said Dr. Flanagan, who directs the Nun Study, now housed at the UT Health San Antonio's Glenn Biggs Institute for Alzheimer's and Neurodegenerative Diseases. "It really introduced the concept of studying earlier disease onset to try to determine some of the earliest changes that happen in the brain."

Dr. Margaret Flanagan assumed directorship of the Nun Study in 2021, embracing the leadership role and undertaking the monumental task of relocating the priceless materials of the Nun Study from Chicago to San Antonio.

One enormous benefit of using a group of religious sisters as study subjects was the uniformity in their lifestyles. The similarity of sisters' housing, nutrition, health care, income, and social networks removed many confounding variables, making it easier for researchers to determine what factors increase or decrease the risk of dementia. In addition, the detailed record-keeping maintained by the congregation provided scientists with a wealth of information from sisters' early life, including family history and early writing samples. The sisters also had an unusually high brain donation rate, providing the opportunity to compare neuropathology findings from both impaired and healthy brains, which had been historically difficult.

Sister Gabriel Mary Spaeth, a research associate with the Nun Study from 1991-2007, works with Sister Dorothy Rickert who was a participant in the study.

Significant findings from the Nun Study include new knowledge about:

- **Cognitive resilience and neuropathology:** Some study participants exhibited significant pathological changes within the brain without exhibiting symptoms of cognitive decline, indicating the existence of factors that contribute to cognitive resilience despite the presence of Alzheimer's pathology.
- **Genotypes and dementia risk:** Researchers identified a specific risk gene that increases the likelihood of developing Alzheimer's disease as well as a protective gene that may reduce the risk.
- **Early-life predictors of cognitive health:** The relationship between early-life linguistic ability and

(Above) Scientists with the Nun Study continue to push the boundaries of Alzheimer's research. (Below) Dr. Seshadri (left) and Dr. Flanagan (center) welcome Sisters Deb Sciano, Charmaine Krohe, and Charlene Zeisset to the brain bank where the priceless specimens donated by sisters are kept.

later-life cognitive function is a major finding of the Nun Study. Scientists have found that high idea density and grammatical complexity in young adulthood correlates with a lower risk of cognitive impairment in later life.

- **Comorbid neuropathologies and dementia risk:** The Nun Study emphasizes that most cases of dementia involve the coexistence of several different pathologies. The presence of these multiple brain pathologies suggests that multi-targeted therapeutic strategies may be necessary.

In addition to using data to conduct their own research, the staff of the Nun Study is working to digitize all study materials to make information available to other researchers. With digital pathology and artificial intelligence reshaping the study of Alzheimer's and related dementias, there is great hope for further advancement in precision diagnosis and preventive intervention of cognitive decline.

"I expect that over the next four or five decades we will continue to learn secrets by studying this treasure trove," said Dr. Seshadri, founding director at the Glenn Biggs Institute for Alzheimer's & Neurodegenerative Diseases. "We are just beginning to mine the information."

The Religious Orders Study

Although all the participants in the Nun Study have passed away, some currently living School Sisters of Notre Dame are continuing the tradition of contributing to dementia research by serving as subjects for the Religious Orders Study being conducted at the Rush Alzheimer's Disease Center at Rush University in Chicago. This study is finding that cognitive exercise including social activities and learning new skills has a protective effect on brain health and the onset of dementia, while negative psychological factors like anxiety and clinical depression are correlated with cognitive decline.

"The sisters 'hire for mission' and with that trust that our working within SSND will call forth the SSND charism within us."

- Yvonne DeBruin, director of mission formation, Atlantic-Midwest Province

SSND partners in ministry
CARRY ON THE CHARISM

Decades ago, it was common to walk the halls of any Catholic school in North America and find a sister in almost every office and classroom. At that time, School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) served as principals and administrators in SSND, diocesan, and archdiocesan schools. They taught, staffed education offices, sat on boards, and led SSND outreach service organizations.

As declining vocations to religious life in North America led to fewer sisters in active ministry, laypeople increasingly came to hold positions formerly reserved for women religious. But although sisters may not always be the boots on the ground in SSND ministries these days, the congregation's mission and charism remain ever at the heart of its sponsored, co-sponsored, and affiliated ministries. At SSND-sponsored Mount Mary University in Milwaukee, for example, President Dr. Isabelle Cherney, a layperson, leads with the spirit of SSND always in the forefront of her mind. "I think about the statement, 'We are educators in all we are and do,' every day," said Dr. Cherney, quoting the SSND Constitution, *You Are Sent*. "And I take very seriously the SSND commitment to providing access to transformative education."

Because lay leaders like Dr. Cherney—who have a deep understanding and strong call to the SSND charism—are essential to the continuance of the congregation's mission, the School Sisters of Notre Dame are both devoted to and intentional about identifying, nurturing, and educating those leaders. That commitment has led to the development of dedicated mission and ministry offices within the

"We work hard to develop an environment where everyone can grow and develop with a strong moral compass to get us to the oneness that SSND and all of us espouse," said Mount Mary University President Dr. Isabelle Cherney, shown here at commencement ceremonies. "It is very important that we do this right."

Atlantic-Midwest (AM) and Central Pacific (CP) Provinces. These departments help ministries sustain the charism of SSND into the future by providing ministry leaders with an understanding and appreciation of what grounds and animates the lives and mission of the sisters. The offices also create an avenue for lay leaders—often referred to by sisters as "partners in ministry"—to discuss the concerns that arise in their ministries and to network among SSND sisters, associates, and lay leaders.

The ministry office in the AM Province began nearly 20 years ago with the objective of ensuring that all

its sponsored and co-sponsored ministries reflect the spirit, values, and commitments of SSND, maintain their Catholic identity, operate with the high standards that have historically characterized SSND ministries, and establish a path for sustainability. The office runs a ministry formation program that introduces lay leaders to SSND history, mission, and charism, as well as the tenets of Catholic Social Teaching. The program also offers participants an opportunity to meet and network with others who work in SSND ministries and a chance to nurture their own spiritual lives.

At a recent ministry formation gathering in the AM Province, Sister Kathleen Cornell and Sister Sharon Kanis led participants through an examination of SSND directional statements through the years with a particular focus on the most recent one—The Call of the 25th General Chapter. Participants reflected on how they could respond to that call in their own ministries.

"The sisters 'hire for mission' and with that trust that our working within SSND will call forth the SSND charism within us," said Yvonne DeBruin, director of mission formation in the Atlantic-Midwest Province. "They trust that the Holy Spirit is at work within us and that we are following the Spirit's prompting."

In the CP Province, Sister Joan Andert and Sister Carol Jean Dust began a ministry office in 2019 with

The Central Pacific Province's Ministry Commission meets at Sancta Maria in St. Louis. The commission consists of a total of 12 sisters and laypeople. Members sit on boards of sponsored and cosponsored ministries and sometimes on the boards of affiliated ministries. "We continue to be in relationship and provide formative moments," Sister Carol Jean Dust said of the group.

Sister Sharon Kanis speaks to Ministry Formation Program participants at the most recent session held at Villa Assumpta in Baltimore.

input from focus groups and committees as well as what Sister Joan describes as "boxes and boxes of literature". "I think every sister related to ministry brought in every piece of paper they had relating to those ministries," said Sister Joan. "That gave us a wonderful platform on which to build. From there, we asked ourselves, 'What are the ideals we want to see in every ministry?' We fleshed out that vision and worked out how to articulate and share those key components. Doing that is what allows us to hand things off with confidence. It is important for the sisters who put their blood, sweat, and tears into their ministries to know that those ministries are being carried on."

At the Living Earth Center (LEC), an SSND sponsored ministry founded in 1996 by Sister Kathleen Storms and the late Sister Mary Tacheny, the SSND charism is embraced, embodied, and sustained by Laura Peterson, a layperson who has served as its executive director for the past seven years. Laura is unwavering in her dedication to making sure the SSND charism is infused into everything they do at the Minnesota-based ministry.

"Our staff considers it an honor to hold the SSND legacy," said Laura. "The Living Earth Center connects people to the land and to healthy, organic produce. Even though we do a lot of different things, at the heart of all of it is the invitation for people to be in unity with each other. Those values are carried out

in ways that can be meaningful for everyone. That is where the longevity is."

Longevity is precisely what is at stake in the effort to pass along portions of the responsibility for leading SSND ministries into the future. "Being able to share our ministries with lay partners is a blessing," said Sister Delia Dowling, who serves as chair of the AM Province's Sponsor Council. This newly formed body includes a mix of sisters and laypeople who help shepherd ministries connected with the congregation. The CP Province has a similar group, known as the Ministry Commission.

The blessings that arise through collaboration between sisters and lay leaders go both ways. For Helen Ramos Paiz, executive Director of Caroline House, a sponsored ministry that provides English language and life skills to women and children in Connecticut, the chance to minister with SSND is a gift she didn't even realize she had been waiting for. "I didn't have a name for it, but I had a passion to help others," said Helen. "It has been a blessing for me to find this mission in my life, and it is a privilege that the sisters allow me to carry this on. It's so good to know that I have the sisters' support and that they entrust us as laypeople to continue with the same passion, care, and love that they have."

That kind of trust is woven into the fabric of the SSND story from its very beginnings. "Our foundresses knew how to 'share and entrust' the mission and charism," said Sister Delia. "I recall the story of Mother Theresa who came to America with a small band of five young sisters. After establishing some schools, she returned to Germany and left the mission and charism in the hands of Mother Caroline and the others. Knowing our history helps us to move forward in faith and hope."

Once a week, staff members at Caroline House meet for reflection. The two sisters on staff often incorporate messages about the SSND charism and everyone shares their experiences. "The gathering is voluntary, but everyone comes," said Executive Director Helen Ramos Paiz.

Rooted within the same SSND values from which it was originally founded, Living Earth Center brings people together to cultivate common ground and seek justice through education, encounter, and community agriculture.

"God loves and cherishes everyone; therefore I prioritize humanity first."

- Sister Meg Umoh,
head of public health department, University of Makeni

Catholic and Muslim communities COME TOGETHER IN LOVE

by Sister Meg Umoh

Ministering with the people of Sierra Leone, particularly among the youth at the University of Makeni as the head of the Public Health Department (HOD) and director of the Center of Excellence in Maternal and Child Health Education and Research, has filled my heart with deep affection for the people I work with and a sincere sense of fulfillment in my efforts.

Sierra Leone is a nation that has endured 11 years of civil war, mudslides, and Ebola, yet its citizens continue to depend on and trust in God. This is an expression of faith deeply rooted in hope. The people's humble, simple, free-spirited nature and religious tolerance offer valuable lessons to the rest of the world. Despite their nation's hardships, they consistently find creative ways to relax and celebrate God's love and faithfulness. These admirable qualities have blessed me personally.

Sister Meg Umoh receives the key to the center of Excellence in Maternal and Child Health Education and Research, presented to her by the chairman of the board.

The people of Sierra Leone open their hearts and souls to welcome, appreciate, and love everyone they encounter, regardless of their religious affiliation. They have shown me that living in a Muslim-dominated culture provides a unique opportunity to express my faith inclusively, ensuring all feel welcomed, loved, and respected.

I have been graced with patience, compassion, tolerance, inclusivity, love, and hope for the future as I mentor and train students and graduates in the public health field, preparing them to respond to emergencies and outbreaks with love, compassion, and empathy – placing the dignity of each person at the center of our efforts. The challenge lies in witnessing some young people with immense potential turning to drugs and other harmful substances amid economic crises and unemployment. Nevertheless, I remain hopeful through the small ways I bear witness to my own life and fidelity to my vows. A reassuring question I often ask myself is: how can I better prepare my students to be more empathetic, responsible, and attentive to the health concerns of low-income people as we strive to expand and strengthen healthcare systems through education, research, and community engagement?

Ministering in a community of diverse religions, particularly one dominated by Muslims, has been a true blessing and deeply fulfilling. The intermarriages

that occur between Muslims and Christians are vital to their sense of unity. The opportunity to worship in both mosques and churches fosters love and togetherness. The profoundly significant message is the freedom of worship and the need to prioritize the dignity and concerns of the human person, especially women and children, over religious differences. As School Sisters of Notre Dame, our charism of unity encourages me daily to yearn for the oneness of humanity, placing humanity above religion. God loves and cherishes everyone; therefore, I prioritize humanity first.

Creating a community with people from different backgrounds has been an experience of mutuality, reaching out in love and care and receiving love without prejudice. I use every opportunity to invite others to share my faith, as they also share with me, and together, we continue to form an inclusive community where everyone feels welcome regardless of religion.

Bridge-building, intercultural sharing, and understanding have been evident in my ministry. Even though we are a Catholic institution, relating daily with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and different family upbringings has opened me to embracing religious diversity.

A powerful way of living this out is that towards the end of the holy month of Ramadan, the Muslim community always invites me to join them in praying and presenting food items to our immediate community's poor and vulnerable persons. Praying with them as a Catholic sister is an excellent symbol of religious tolerance, inclusivity, and oneness.

Sister Meg Umoh teaches environmental health.

Although we have different ways of expressing our faith, we all strive towards becoming a more loving, caring, and compassionate society where a civilization of love is paramount. This continues to remind me in my spiritual journey that humanity comes first despite our diverse ways of worship. Promoting the dignity of the human person has always been at the heart of my ministry.

Ministering with persons from different religions has impacted my spirituality as I have continued to let something in me die for growth to happen. I have continued to embrace all and offer and receive love notwithstanding religious background. This has helped me to move towards daily integration of unity and acceptance of the other. I keep realizing that God's love overshadows religion and impels me to create an environment where everyone can strive to become their best self for the common good. I have always believed that Jesus is in every person, irrespective of our diverse religions.

Sisters celebrate the 50th anniversary of SSND presence in Sierra Leone.

A member of the Muslim Jamaat at the University of Makeni, Sister Meg Umoh was invited to share a message of hope at the Makeni polio camp at this year's Independence Day event.

School Sisters of Notre Dame

sisters, associates, and ministry partners
IN PRAYER, MINISTRY, AND COMMUNITY

Sisters Carol Jean Dust, Bridget Waldorf, and Jill Laszewski welcome participants to a discernment retreat at Sancta Maria in St. Louis.

Sisters sing the Magnificat during the perpetual profession of Sister Esther Bassey and 50th anniversary of SSND presence in Nigeria.

Sisters participate in a celebration dinner following a retreat for sisters and associates in Kyoto, Japan.

Sisters Leona Dentinger, Harriet Schnurr, and Rosalie Reitzel enjoy St. Patrick's Day in Waterdown, Ontario.

Sister Sarah Kipsang and students of Pope Benedict XVI Minor Seminary in Nyabururu, Kenya, incorporate the lessons of Laudato Si' into their lives by removing plastic from the soil on school grounds.

Sister Patricia Shae is delighted to find a 1948 graduation dress like the one she would have worn when she was a student at the Institute of Notre Dame (IND) while perusing a traveling exhibit of memorabilia that came to Villa Assumpta in Baltimore.

Sister Franca Ekeji and students from Notre Dame Girls' Secondary School in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, share signs they made with "love" written in different Nigerian languages.

Sister Marie Scallon spends time with students in the library at Notre Dame Middle School in Milwaukee.

Sister Stacy Gunnip teaches an iPad class for the sisters.

Associates Margarita Silva, Mary Anne ODonnell, Juan Pablo Padilla, and Patricia Banks gather during a break at the Atlantic-Midwest Province's 2025 Leadership Meeting at Villa Assumpta in Baltimore.

Sister Jennifer Kolan works with students at Mary Queen of Peace School in Capecoast, Ghana.

Sister Beatriz Martinez-Garcia, director of the SSND UN-NGO Office, and Lisa Demler, Shalom director of the Central Pacific Province, take part in the United Nations' Session of the Commission for Social Development.

Sister Anna Marie Reha ministers in Old Fangak in the Greater Upper Nile region of South Sudan.

School Sisters of Notre Dame

SSND AND LAUDATO SI'

As we mark the 10th anniversary of Laudato Si' this year, SSND sisters, associates, and partners in ministry share some of the ways that they have incorporated the lessons of Pope Francis' encyclical into their lives.

Sister Ndukeobong Clement

Bumbuna, Sierra Leone

Sister Ndukeobong Clement worked with her staff at Caritas Makeni to integrate environmental stewardship into their most recent Caritas Week activities. Team members undertook a dedicated environmental sanitation exercise, reaffirming their commitment to sustainability. "The effort became a powerful act of witness, as others were inspired to join in," said Sister Ndukeobong.

Notre Dame Preparatory School

Towson, Maryland

Students at NDP have learned about sustainable growing by cultivating herbs in a hydroponic system; celebrated Earth Day with a variety of activities; marked World Water Day with a donation to the Thirst Project; displayed handmade designs crafted from recycled materials at sustainable fashion showcases; and participated in Project Clean Stream, a volunteer cleanup of the Chesapeake Bay.

Associates Donna Haley and Miriam Hankins

Columbia, Missouri

Donna and Miriam used the occasion of their parish picnic to display a variety of items that are easier on the environment than their traditional counterparts. Items included in the display were toothbrushes, toilet paper, and cutlery made from bamboo; disposable plates made from sugar cane fiber; bars of soap that can be used as both body wash and shampoo; and a package of laundry detergent sheets.