Rescuing the Young at Risk

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"Being built together into a dwelling place of God…"

Ephesians 2:22
My dear friends of Notre Dame,

The last few years will go down in history for the dramatic shifts in unusual weather patterns in the global north and south. Earthquakes, floods, tsunami and tornados have wreaked havoc resulting in death, disease, homelessness, looting and violence. Rome, Italy, the site of the Congregational Generalate Office, suffered through a January ice and snow storm in which many people died due to freezing temperatures and the collapse of their dwelling places under the weight of snow and ice on roofs and wires. We mourn the loss of every human being, grieve with the survivors and contribute wherever we are able to assist those “picking up the pieces” and starting anew.

Shaped and formed each day by faith rooted in the words of Revelation, “See the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them as their God; they will be God’s people, and God will be with them; God will wipe every tear from their eyes,” (Revelation 21:3) Sisters of Notre Dame look for and craft ways to be and “build a dwelling place of God...” (Ephesians 2:22) for people at risk, impoverished, abandoned, rejected or ignored. Mission Integration aspires toward creating links among educators who are determined to reveal God dwelling among mortals.

With you, we look for ever new and creative ways to cooperate with the God who never tires of revealing divine love in concrete ways through compassionate and caring human beings.

May you discover yourself as a “dwelling place” of the goodness of God! May others rejoice in the presence of God in their midst because of you! Thank you!

In God’s Goodness,

Teresita Weind, SNDdeN
Congregational Leader
When asked to write for Good Works, I welcomed this opportunity to share the ministry and growth of the Notre Dame Centre (NDC) in Glasgow, Scotland. It was formerly known as the Notre Dame Child Guidance Clinic and Fern Tower Adolescent Unit.

A multi-disciplinary team of professionals comprise the staff at the Centre. Psychologists, art and play therapists, social workers and counsellors offer therapeutic service to children, young people and families experiencing emotional distress. Individuals are referred through child and adolescent mental health service, social work services and educational institutions. The young people come for many reasons but generally, because they have already experienced traumatic events in their lives. Our goal is to offer them therapeutic and psychological treatment. Ministering to them, we aim: “To contribute to the building up of integrated human beings capable of taking their place as members of the family and society.” Mission Statement

An SND’s Vision

In 2011, the Notre Dame Centre acknowledged the vision of its SND foundress and celebrated 80 Years of continued care for children and young people at risk. A lecturer in psychology in Notre Dame Dowanhill Teacher Training College in Glasgow, Sr. Marie Hilda Marley recognized that many city children and young people were suffering from emotional distress in their lives. She saw the great need for psychological therapy in this young population. In 1931, Sr. Marie Hilda opened the Notre Dame Child Guidance Clinic where she pioneered this therapeutic work with children, young people and their families, at a time when there were no such national health services nor child and adolescent psychiatric services. Through her forward-looking thinking about therapy, she applied this psychodynamic thinking to individuals while also keeping in mind the importance of the family.

Today, our Notre Dame Centre continues to value the importance of working with significant adults in the young person’s life: parents, care-givers and teachers. We provide training, consultation and supervision to other professionals and have a drop-in for parents seeking consultation and advice. Many children in Glasgow live with their grandparents or other family members because their parents suffer from drug and/or alcohol addictions. Many of these young people have lived in very deprived and unsafe homes or hostels prior to living with their grandparents.

Kevin’s Cry for Help

I am 10 years old. I live with my gran, because my mum is addicted to drugs and is in prison and my dad died of an overdose. I have lived with my gran on and off since I was a baby. I often went back to my mum because she kept saying she was better and off drugs. I have two little sisters but they were taken away as babies and are now in foster care. I sometimes wonder what I will do if something happens to my gran, she isn’t really very well and last year she was in hospital for three weeks. Sometimes I help look after her. I have loved coming to see my play therapist every week at Notre Dame Centre as it’s good to have a place to talk in private. My gran has also seen a social worker at Notre Dame and gets a lot of support too, it’s something we do together.
From an early age, many children have suffered from the absence of their mothers. These mothers are not emotionally available to children, often unable to respond to the child’s need, even to feed, touch, hold the child, change their nappies or care for the child in any way. Many children have also experienced very violent and aggressive relationships between their parents. In some cases, the children have become anxious about a parent’s welfare. Some children even try to wake parents to feed and care for them; some have watched their mothers fall asleep and die. The psychological impact of these experiences is traumatic and profound.

At the Notre Dame Centre, we offer hourly therapeutic sessions at the same time each week to work with those who are vulnerable. In this way, we provide a very predictable, reliable and safe space for these children. In time, a child can begin to re-experience a trusting relationship. In a parallel session, another worker helps the grandmother to reflect on her feelings and thoughts about the loss of her son or daughter, and the guilt she experiences sometimes. While in her sixties or seventies, she has the responsibility of parenting a child with emotional difficulties.

Carla’s Story:
Some young people continue to seek help at NDC for several years. I worked with an adolescent girl who was referred at 14 years old because she was depressed, with low mood and risk-taking behaviours such as not eating and self-harming by cutting herself. She had very scarred arms and legs. As we continued to work together, Carla and I often sat in silence, as I tried to tolerate and understand very difficult feelings that she projected. In time, she was able to speak more, and gradually her story unravelled. Carla continues to struggle with disturbing images and feelings, often putting her life at risk.

Throughout our sessions, Carla found it helpful to express her feelings by art work and by writing. Her own words, in a poem, convey her message more powerfully than I could ever describe:

Carla’s Poem: “The Kid”

The kid is huddled on the floor.  
Waiting, watching pleading ‘no more.’  
The kid is naked, crying in pain.  
Don’t move a muscle, they’ll come again.

The kid is tired, red, black and blue.  
Why won’t you listen. She’s calling you.  
The kid is angry, screaming, rage.  
Open your eyes, this isn’t a stage.

The kid’s gone quiet. What has she done?  
She opened her mouth, but you didn’t come.  
The kid broke the rule. Punishment, pain.  
Quietly dying, begin the game.

The kid is me.  
Could even be you.  
Shut down all systems.  
All you can do.

In a variety of ways, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur have enabled the growth of this “good work” at the Notre Dame Centre. Throughout these 80 years, SNDs from the British Province have supported the Centre by service as clinical directors, staff and board members, and by the quiet and prayerful interest of many Sisters. The Province Leadership Team members are the trustees and appoint other board members. Currently Sr. Mary McClure from the Province Team and Sr. Mary Ross, retired Director of NDC, serve on the board. This ministry exemplifies our ND belief that

“We yearn to deepen our commitment to stand with our sisters and brothers…and accompany them in their struggle.”

2008 General Chapter Calls
In January 2009, two Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SND) went to Haiti to begin a new ministry. Invited by the Bishop of Les Cayes, they responded to needs articulated by the people and the Church. At present, Sr. Jeannette Pierre-Louis ministers in Les Cayes; SNDs and Associates join her periodically to help the Haitian people.

A DWELLING PLACE OF GOD IN HAITI

By Sister Jeannette Pierre-Louis, SNDdeN

Hardly had our new ministry of outreach begun when an enormous earthquake in January 2010 racked serious devastation, causing thousands of deaths and injuries. Earthquake aftershocks and tornadoes brought more pain, squalor, destruction, injury and thousands of deaths. Many left without homes, food and water became refugees in our city. This natural disaster delayed somewhat our SND dreams for a family education center in Haiti but we reached out to the people in providing food, clothing and medical assistance. We began our action plan for human development and literacy in Les Cayes.

MISSION IN HAITI

Those living in poverty in Les Cayes are finding a “dwelling place of God,” in the presence of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. Les Cayes in South Haiti has 140,000 people. In La Savane, one of the city’s 12 slums, adults and children suffer from hunger, malnutrition, diseases and homelessness. The literacy rate, especially among women, is very low: about 80% neither read nor write. Most children do not go to school. Even where there are schools, parents do not have money for the tuition or uniforms. SNDs are responding with mind and heart to a participative program for 100 women at the Family Education Center. We reach 522 more people in the households of these women. These extended families benefit from food assistance, health care and dental aid for their children at the Centre. We provide also tutoring in English for young people of high-school age. We are working to build a refuge from the storms, poverty, corruption and their moral effects in Haitian society.

DEVELOPMENT FOR WOMEN

We focus on education for life. A coordinating team of religious and laity has organized opportunities for personal development of women, for their spiritual, professional and cultural growth. We are teaching women skills for responding to critical life situations and for using their giftedness.

We encourage them to bring sick children to free clinics. Through basic education, women are beginning to read, and to write their own names and their children’s names. They are gradually growing in self-esteem.

Women are becoming floral designers by learning methods in creating various flower arrangements for weddings and funerals. They style floral wreaths and crosses. Also, we are teaching women the art of making quilts: cutting, padding and sewing different styles or creations of beauty. They learn marketing and sale of their work. The finished product of a handmade quilt or a styled flower arrangement uplifts the heart and spirit of each woman.

For me, the most encouraging aspect of educating these women comes when they recognize their creations as reflections of the goodness of God. They express audibly their joy and gratitude to the Divine Creator. The women in our Center are personally convinced that God is really good to them and in them. They have the power to bring change into their own lives. In finding a means to generate income, they become self-sufficient; they are able to provide money for their family needs. Investing in their families, they find dignity within themselves and ways also to restore hope in others. Our ministry raises them up and strengthens the courage of a people still mourning tragic losses.

1804 LINKS HAITI AND ST. JULIE BILLIART

God has linked Notre Dame and Haiti in time and history. In 1803, Napoleon Bonaparte dispatched his army to restore French rule and slavery in Haiti. A former slave, General Jean-Jacques Dessalines led a revolution and brought victory for his country. On January 1, 1804, Haiti won independence from France as the First Black Republic in the world. In that same year on February 2, St. Julie founded the Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame in Amiens, France. Today, SNDs are embracing the people of Haiti, the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, in response to the call of our 2008 General Chapter: “to listen to the mourning…of those impoverished by the growing divide between rich and poor…” Julie’s saying that “God is good” is repeated often in Creole with “Bondye Bon.”
Emmanuel College in Boston, Massachusetts is a dynamic, coeducational college, enrolling 2,500 students, rooted in the liberal arts and sciences, and informed by the vision of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and the belief that education is the greatest work on earth. Emmanuel’s academic tradition is distinguished by rigorous scholarship and a commitment to strong ethical values. Its community is characterized by vibrant faith and a joyful spirit.

Transforming Lives

Under the leadership of President Sister Janet Eisner, SNDdeN, Emmanuel has experienced an amazing decade of growth, with enrollment tripling in that time. The College now offers more than 40 academic programs as well as vibrant student life experiences. In 2012, as the College is on its way to a Centennial celebration in 2019, the mission of transforming lives through education is more compelling than ever. This year, the College is engaging in mission-based strategic planning, with campus-wide participation, through on-going reflection and informed dialogue.

The Emmanuel community continues to immerse itself in understanding this mission in new ways.

The informed conversations include discussions on the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, the integrative role of philosophy and theology in the curriculum, the Catholic character of the College and discussions of the founding vision of the Sisters of Notre Dame.

Founders’ Spirit Lives at Emmanuel

A significant event in the life of the College each year is Founders’ Day, which commemorates the founding of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur by St. Julie Billiart and the founding of Emmanuel College. The Founders’ Day tradition, which began as a one-day celebration twenty years ago, expanded into a weeklong series of events in 2009. Sponsored by Emmanuel’s Center for Mission and Spirituality, Founders’ Week events include evening prayer services; discussions; community service opportunities for students, faculty, and staff, working directly with the SND ministries in Boston; and the screening of the award-winning documentary, “They Killed Sister Dorothy,” about the life and murder of Sister Dorothy Stang, SND and her work on behalf of the indigenous people of Brazil and the Amazon rainforest.

The 2012 celebration on February 2nd featured a special Liturgy, a keynote address by Sr. Janet on the history of the Sisters of Notre Dame and of the founders, using their own words, and reflections by current students about a campus that values open expression of the goodness of God through words, service and actions toward others. Emmanuel’s President of the Student Government Association, Jordan Coulombe ’12, spoke about his experience of mission through academics, student life and service – particularly through Alternative Spring Break, during which he served in Wheeling, West Virginia, and Eagle Butte, South Dakota. He witnessed extreme poverty.

“At Emmanuel, I’ve learned that education is an extremely powerful tool – a tool to empower those who have faced adversity, a tool to combat poverty, a tool to spread love and compassion,” he said.
Center for Mission and Spirituality

During Founders’ Week, the Center for Mission and Spirituality also commissioned the students as members of a new leadership organization, The 1804 Society, named in honor of the founding year of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. The organization encourages students to promote service to others and provides ambassadors of Emmanuel College to the campus and the wider community.

The spirit of Founders’ Week and the example set by today’s Sisters of Notre Dame live in the heart of Emmanuel throughout the year. The Center for Mission and Spirituality offers a regular “Supper with the Sisters,” which brings Emmanuel students together with Sisters of Notre Dame from around the world to share in a conversation and a meal. Through this program, students learn about what the Sisters are currently doing to live out the mission of St. Julie Billiart. An annual lecture series honors one of the College’s most distinguished faculty members, Sr. Marie Augusta Neal, SND, who taught sociology at Emmanuel for nearly 40 years and inspired thousands of students to take an active role in global and social issues.

Emmanuel’s Office of Campus Ministry promotes a community spirit that lives and celebrates the message of the SNDs. In addition to offering focused ministries, retreats, educational programs, prayer services, spiritual direction and Liturgies for students of all faiths, Campus Ministry offers outreach opportunities that enable students to give back to their community. Eighty percent of students participate in community service during their time at Emmanuel, volunteering more than 25,000 hours each year, beginning with the New Student Day of service in the fall.

As Emmanuel College looks to the future and its 100th anniversary, engages in mission-based strategic planning and continues to grow, the Emmanuel mission, Catholic heritage and SND roots remain vibrant.
Beauty & Desert Poverty
In Navajo Land

By Natalie Bussiere, SNDdeN

The Southeast corner of the Navajo Indian Reservation is a land jeweled by red mesas, pinion pines, a rocky, sandy desert floor, and in the shadow of a sacred volcanic mountain. This is home to the Navajo people, first people of the land, who lived simply for centuries, by grazing their sheep and weaving their world famous Navajo rugs. That was then, centuries ago. Now this is a place of difficult struggle for survival in extreme poverty, where some families live in dwellings without running water or electricity.

St. Bonaventure Mission in Thoreau, New Mexico is located in the midst of this beauty and desert poverty. This Mission is an oasis, a special place where Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, with other caring and devoted people from all areas of the United States, minister to God’s people living in poverty. On this Navajo Land, specific ministries include providing housing for low-income families, repairing roofs, delivering water, building outhouses for those with no water, food and other much needed supplies such as blankets and clothing. Many hundreds of donors who assist us by their financial gifts provide these goods and services. Our “Outreach” department provides employment for Navajo people. The major ministry at the Mission is St. Bonaventure School, a preschool and elementary school through the 8th grade.

A Blossoming Oasis

St. Bonaventure School is also a blossoming oasis in this desert land; twelve buildings are connected by a walkway of beautiful trees and flower buckets. Many good things happen here for our children. Our lay teachers, motivated and committed to serving people living in poverty, come from various States in the USA. Navajo women and men help as teaching assistants in each classroom. The Mission provides housing for the teachers because there is not any available housing in the town. Ninety-five percent of our students are Navajo. Their parents choose to send their children to this Catholic school, rather than to schools on the reservation or to public schools, even though the children have to travel for more than an hour on our school bus. Parents give the following reasons for sending their children to St. Bonaventure School: our reputation for success in learning, good discipline, loving and caring teachers and especially a place where their children will learn about God.

For every child, the day starts with prayer; religion is a daily class subject. All classes in our school participate in weekly Mass, celebrated by a visiting priest. The nearest Catholic Church or parish is 30 miles away. Most of the children are Navajo; they bring their beautiful Navajo traditions and spirituality to enrich our lives. When children and their families, or our Navajo teacher assistants are received into the Church, we celebrate their initiation with great joy.

Annually, St. Bonaventure students enter the Native American Science Fair and compete with other native students from every Indian Nation in the US. Each year, our students capture several prizes and awards. We have a gym that is much too small, but we still manage to have four basketball teams. Our teams compete with other New Mexico schools.
EDUCATION CHANGES PEOPLE AND SYSTEMS

“We yearn to deepen our commitment to stand with our brothers and sisters who live in poverty” (2008 General Chapter Calls). As in other impoverished areas of our world, survival is a first priority; success in school is not often considered a high priority. So we struggle to demonstrate and teach the students that education is their way out of poverty. To change systems, we work to enable the personal and academic success of our students and to encourage them to find empowerment in continuing education. We are enthusiastic and proud of St. Bonaventure School alumni/alumnae who have completed college, some from prestigious colleges in the US. One alumna, having won a four-year scholarship, graduated magna cum laude from Dartmouth College. Many of our former students have become successful leaders in their communities, towns and cities.

Living out St. Julie Billiart’s call to Sisters of Notre Dame, “to work for the poor in the most abandoned places,” SNDs have moved from Massachusetts to serve at St. Bonaventure Mission. Sister Sheila Callaghan had taught nine years at our school. Currently, Sisters Marietta Brown, Natalie Bussiere and Diane Shaw minister to two hundred plus students. Over more than 30 years, Sisters have given special public witness of our vowed commitment as Sisters of Notre Dame and our strong apostolic commitment is to educate for life. Students graduating from St. Bonaventure School have grown through a holistic Notre Dame education and bring this wholeness and rootedness beyond the desert of poverty. Students and parents often drum their gratitude in song and dance:


A Navajo student teaches Sr. Natalie Bussiere how to cook Navajo blue-corn-mush (tahheiel).
My journey to South Sudan began in San Francisco on October 29, 2011. Three California SNDs brought me to the airport for my flight to Washington DC and across continents. Called forth by our Congregational Leadership Team, I set out for a new Mission for the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, collaborating with 14 other Congregations. Since 2006, religious congregations have been supporting the efforts of Solidarity with Southern Sudan (SSS). Responding to cries for life and survival in South Sudan, women and men religious have been collaborating through training and education programs in this newly formed African country. In partnership with the local Church and the people of South Sudan, SSS is improving the country’s basic infrastructure by developing teacher and health training institutes as well as Catholic pastoral services. About 25 religious from 13 nations live in five communities that function as the support bases for training health-care professionals, teachers, pastoral care workers and farmers.

**Team of Educators**

On arrival in Juba, South Sudan on October 31, helicopters and planes on the runway alerted me to the active presence of the United Nations. After the line-up at immigration and baggage, I got to the Comboni Sisters’ convent, met one priest, had supper next door with the Daughters of St. Paul and went to bed. On All Saints’ Day, the call to prayer from the near-by mosque was my alarm-clock, announcing my new mission for Solidarity with Southern Sudan (SSS). I am part of this team of educators, offering teacher training programs in four South Sudan States and accepting residential students from all parts of the country. In the capital, Juba, base for the central administration, SSS has pastoral programs. In Western Equatoria, our team is also developing an agricultural program and providing food grown in Riimenze for the students in Solidarity Teacher training College in Yambio. In Bahr el Ghazal State, we direct registered-nurse training and mid-wifery programs.

Meet annually to shape our future ministry. In December, all members gathered in Yambio for a week-long Assembly of Teacher Training for the planning and inspiration for our mission in South Sudan.

Since arriving in South Sudan, I have taught Social Studies In-Service to seven student teachers in the Salesian Primary School in Gumbo-Juba, on the Nile River. While in Juba, I participated in the Silver Jubilee of that Diocese. I am now in Malakal. We are eight in community: six Sisters of different Congregations, from Canada, India, Ireland and the USA. Two Australian laymen have joined us for two months. I am organizing the library and teaching Foundational English to 42 teachers. They have studied in Arabic and are learning English in a program for participation either in the two-year Pre-Service or the four-year In-Service Program. Independent now, South Sudan is encouraging English study at all levels of education. It takes four years to complete teacher training. In the Unity State of Leer, I will offer a third week in the Social Studies In-Service Program to 30 student teachers. In the future, I will be sent to various areas for periods of two to three weeks to do In-Service training – either to teach at the first Solidarity Teacher Training College in Malakal or to organize the library in Wau where SSS is training health workers.

**Challenges in South Sudan**

The challenges are many in this new country: scarcity of water, cooking outside on an open charcoal fire under the blazing sun, getting acquainted with new people and places and adjusting constantly for apostolic mobility. I belong to this team of religious, being called and sent where the need is greatest. I am happy to be doing St. Julie Billiart’s work of teacher-training in an abandoned place. During this time, I have recalled often the day in April 1988 when Sr. Jane McAndrews and I left Nairobi for El Obeid, Sudan. I remember well on Easter Sunday that the Dinka drums for the evening Mass of Resurrection lifted our spirits with joy. The Acts of the Apostles seemed to come alive as we heard the “good news” that the Church was growing in the Nuba Mountains. In South Sudan, I sense hope for the future of the people and the Church. The Gospel message is being brought and spreading through our religious Congregations working with the laity in Solidarity with Southern Sudan, symbolizing for me future ministry in the Church.
SNDdeN Mission

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, women with hearts as wide as the world, make known God’s goodness and love of the poor through a Gospel way of life, community and prayer.

Continuing a strong educational tradition, we take our stand with poor people, especially women and children, in the most abandoned places.

Each of us commits her one and only life to work with others to create justice and peace for all.

Africa
Democratic Republic of Congo
Congo Brazzaville
Kenya
Nigeria
South Africa
South Sudan
Zimbabwe

Latin America
Brazil
Nicaragua
Peru

North America
Haiti
United States
(29 states and the District of Columbia)

Asia
Japan

Europe
Belgium
France
Italy
United Kingdom

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