

CROSS CURRENTS

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur • Ohio Province



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ISSUE 1



A LABOR OF LOVE

MINISTERING TO THE MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur change lives by making known God's goodness with you.

Throughout the world, we are committed to education. We take our stand with those living in poverty, especially women and children in the most abandoned places. Cross Currents is published two times a year for friends of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur by the Ohio Province Development Office.

We invite reader responses on the content of this publication or on the work of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. Comments may be submitted to Kevin Manley, Director of Development, at kmanley@ohsnd.org.

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COVER:
Sister Nancy Wellmeier helps a child select an outfit for the next leg of his family's journey.



“BLESSED ARE THE POOR,” JESUS SAID.

Down through the centuries, the decades, and years until this very day, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur have lifted up this Beatitude not just in word but in action.

In the earliest days, it was with school children who were poor, immigrant factory workers, African-Americans newly liberated from slavery. Today, it's with former inmates needing job training, people with handicaps living in abject poverty, homeless veterans.

And too, it's with people fleeing violence and extortion, seeking a new life in this wonderful country. People who turn to Sister Nancy Wellmeier for food, clothing and shelter, and a means whereby they can journey to the homes of their American families (see page 3).

It's with people seeking health care and children seeking education in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Sisters providing that health care and education even as their own house burns to the ground (see page 8).

The Sisters work with those whom we might consider abandoned, the very ones spoken of in the Beatitude — “for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Sincerely,

KEVIN MANLEY
Director of Development



BY EXTENSION: OUR SISTERS' WORK WITH IMMIGRANTS

L TO R:
Sisters Jo Anne Depweg,
Maria Olivia Pacheco and
Liane Delsuc fill backpacks
with essentials like
food and toiletries for
immigrant families to take
on the road.

“This is just an extension of what we came to this country for,” says Sister Nancy Wellmeier.

“Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur focus on the most vulnerable, the people who need the most help. And that's usually the new-comers.”

Sister Nancy says this from Mesa, Arizona, where she and Sister Maria Olivia Pacheco minister to immigrants arriving from Mexico and Central America.

It's a labor of love.

Sister Nancy, a Dayton, Ohio native, first came to the American Southwest and to Mexico in the summer of 1966, when she was missioned to Mexico to prepare children for first communion. Then in 1971 she was missioned to parish ministry in another part of Mexico.

The two experiences cemented her passion for the area and for the people. "It's where my heart was," she says, and there was no need to leave. Except for a six-year term on the Congregational Leadership Team in Rome, she seldom has.

Today, at 77, her schedule remains full. Technically, she has two days a week off. Technically, because on one of those days she's often in Sonoyta, Mexico, helping individuals and families seeking asylum in the United States with basic supplies including food and winter clothing. Last year, she would have seen many of these same people on this side of the border, but because of the new policy of holding asylum seekers in Mexico, she goes where the need is.

"We were called to this country by the bishop of Cincinnati to work with immigrants," she says, "among whom were my great-great grandparents." And although that was 180 years ago, Sister Nancy doesn't see how the year much matters.

"With what's happening, I feel drawn to help the people here," she says.

This help includes teaching citizenship classes (Mondays), working with area churches to provide supplies to immigrants with provisional passage on their way to family members and sponsors (Tuesdays), teaching English classes (Wednesdays), volunteering at a free medical



ABOVE
L TO R: Sisters Nancy Wellmeier and Maria Olivia Pacheco give a warm welcome to a young family.

OPPOSITE PAGE
Sister Jo Anne Depweg provides a young mother and her child with a meal and ray of hope.

clinic to provide translation services (Thursdays), and visiting a shelter for unaccompanied minors (Sundays).

But the intense work, the work of our times, is spent with people in the desperate situation of having no home to safely return to, no home on the horizon in which to rest, and only a day-to-day existence filled with cold, danger and worry.

As is the case of the people in the Casa San Pedro shelter in Sonoyta, in the cartel territory of Sonora State, Mexico, where several years ago, in a week-long period, 28 people were murdered, and where the police chief was executed — and to which Sister Nancy and Sister Maria Olivia drive at every opportunity to deliver clothing, rice and beans.

A Common Cause

They are not alone. Also in Sonoyta are School Sisters of Notre Dame from Douglas, Arizona, likewise bringing supplies to Casa San Pedro, and where volunteers have poured a concrete floor, built bunk beds and installed a washer and dryer. The Jesuits, the Missionary Sisters of the Eucharist, the American Diocese of Tucson and the Mexican Diocese of Nogales have also together established the Kino Border Initiative, which among many services is providing emergency shelter, food and first aid to migrants seeking asylum in the United States, as well as to those deported.



Churches of all denominations are teaming up not only along the border but also in cities hours distant, as far away as Mesa and Phoenix, where Sisters Nancy and Maria Olivia live, and where Notre Dame Sisters Margaret Campbell and Meg Walsh live as well. Catholic churches, mainline Protestant churches and Pentecostal churches are opening up their buildings to provide meals, clothing, medical services and, importantly, logistical support to move immigrants to the homes of friends and family members spread across the country. Nurses are helping. Doctors are helping. A Lutheran church is each week clearing its sanctuary of pews to accommodate immigrants, then bringing the pews back for Sunday services. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is offering its facilities. St. Matthew Parish in Phoenix has opened an old convent.

“It’s been so rewarding to work with sisters and brothers of other faiths.”
 — SISTER NANCY

"It's been so rewarding to work with sisters and brothers of other faiths," says Sister Nancy. "And they do it out of such faith. They say, 'We do this because this is what Christians do. It's what the Gospels say to do.'

"These are people," Sister Nancy says, "who really believe in a moral, ethical world."



One-to-one, Face-to-face

When Sister Nancy meets immigrants, she often tells them she hopes she never sees them again. Because if she doesn't, perhaps the outcome will have been a good one, and their journey will have come to an end.

She tells this to children in one of the many shelters for unaccompanied minors, where she is allowed a single hour to meet with as many children as possible, and to bring Communion, to provide catechesis, and always to offer a pep talk. "When I come back," she says to them, "I hope you'll be gone."

And to adults on the journey, those granted provisional passage, she offers the hope and the solace of the Church, but she gets practical, too. She shows them how to recharge ankle monitors, and tells them how, with the

“
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This is the real
spirit of the
United States.”
— SISTER NANCY

monitors on, to take a shower. And she says to everyone:

“The police are here to help you, not to hurt you.

“You have to send your children to school.

ABOVE

Helping immigrant mothers and their children is where Sister Nancy Wellmeier’s heart is.

“The police don’t take bribes in this country.

“You can’t work because you don’t have a work permit.”

Then she bids them farewell, turns around, and with volunteers from all over the country and from so many religious traditions, plows into the week ahead.

“I’ve been drawn to this type of migrant, this type of refugee,” she says, “the ones who are vulnerable, who don’t know how things work. It’s why I’m here.”

And then she says, referring to the hundreds who have joined in the work, “Seeing all these volunteers, it’s a glimmer of hope. This is the real spirit of the United States.” ■



SISTER DOROTHY AND IMMIGRANTS

Sister Dorothy Stang dedicated her life to the subsistence farmers and their families in the Amazon. She helped them come together into base Christian communities, taught them ways to market their crops, and organized them to better protect the land and their way of life from the always encroaching loggers and cattle ranchers.

But she didn’t start this way. Instead, she followed the people who needed her. When the government of Brazil offered land to people who were poor, in part to emigrate them out of the cities, Sister Dorothy did as Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur do all over the world, and as they have done since they first responded to the needs of immigrants in Cincinnati and the growing United States — she went with them. She didn’t begin there nor did she map out her ministry in advance. She

traveled to where the needs were, to where the immigrants were, as Sisters Nancy Wellmeier and Maria Olivia Pacheco are doing along the U.S.-Mexico border.

It was dangerous work. A bishop said to her, “Go as far as your courage will carry you.” Once the death threats had begun, and on a visit home, Provincial Sister Elizabeth Bowyer told her she was under no obligation to return.

“No,” Sister Dorothy said. “I’m going back.”

“
...I live here and
this is my mission,
to be poor with
the poor and work
with them to
make a better life.”
— SISTER DOROTHY

“It was because of the people she cared about,” Sister Elizabeth said. “She had to go back.”

Much as Sisters Nancy and Maria Olivia always go back. ■

NEWSBRIEFS



SISTER ELIZABETH BOWYER HONORED WITH DOROTHY STANG AWARD FOR OHIO

Holy Name Parish in Cincinnati presented **Sister Elizabeth Bowyer** with its Dorothy Stang Award. The award, sponsored by the Mission Office of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati as part of the international year honoring missionaries, was presented by parishes in the Archdiocese to parishioners mirroring the values and actions of Sister Dorothy Stang, who was martyred in the Amazonian rainforest for her work on behalf of subsistence farmers and protection of the environment.

“Being presented with this award has touched me greatly,” Sister Elizabeth said. “It means that the people of this worship community saw in me some of Sister Dorothy’s strength and beauty.”

Unlike many if not all of the award recipients, Sister Elizabeth knew Sister Dorothy, having first met her in 1952. ■

FIRE IN KISANTU

Everything happened at once. It was 3 am, September 29, 2019.

A man on a motorbike saw flames. At the same time, a Sister awakened to smoke.

The man raced to the small houses fronting the Kisantu, Democratic Republic of Congo convent of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. He banged on doors.

The Sister, opening her own door, peering down the convent hall, saw flames.

From there the night broke open.

Twenty-five tenants of the houses, most of them teachers in the Sisters’ schools, scaled the wall surrounding the convent and entered the ground floor. Eight Sisters, all on the second floor, ran for the stairwell. Sister Emily Mullen, there for only the night, passing through from Kinshasa, could see almost nothing. “People were running all over,” she said. “There was no electricity. Smoke was everywhere.”

Minutes passed. Then the Sisters, down the



stairs, all accounted for, rushed to the round rain tank behind the building, and with the teachers started a bucket brigade, carrying the buckets up and down the stairwell. The fire on the second floor, initially confined to a single room, began through the ceiling.

“This isn’t like America,” Sister Lorraine Connell, General Treasurer for the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, later said. “There is no fire department. Once a place catches fire...”



LEFT
The entrance to the Kisantu, Congo convent in 2009.

The Kisantu convent was built in 1900 by the Jesuits, and for 120 years served as one of the largest buildings in Bas-Congo Province, where Kisantu is located. A long, blue veranda, opening off the sleeping rooms, extended along its front.

And along the veranda, the night of the fire, Sisters began throwing over their belongings.

“It didn’t take long to see what we were doing wasn’t going to work,” said Sister Emily. “Twenty minutes after I woke up I realized we weren’t going to put it out with water. If you don’t have those hoses, if you don’t have that kind of water on the fire, there’s really nothing to stop it.”

The blaze now had worked its way through the ceiling, moved laterally down the building’s attic, and was burning both through the roof and down into other parts of the second floor, working its way to the ground.

“Everyone ran out”, said Sister Emily. “We just stood. We just stood and watched the fire.”

So did many of the 1,500 students attending the Sisters’ three schools, 600 of whom live on the convent grounds. So did the other Sisters, also living on the grounds. And so did the denizens of Kisantu itself.

By 6 am, it was over. Only the two-foot-thick brick and mud walls remained. And a few days later,

after heavy rains, they came down as well.

“When the rain got on the walls,” said Sister Emily, “it dissolved the mud, and the walls began falling. The walls resisted the fire, but they couldn’t resist the rain.”

Over the next week, Sisters wandered about, still finding their possessions. In many cases, what they thought had been lost had in the chaos been thrown over the veranda. Not thrown over, nor removed, were the contents of a large storage room where at the end of each day, employees of the schools brought over sewing machines, computers and books, to keep them safe from thievery. All, instead, were consumed by the flames.

Post-fire, Sisters are living in guest rooms on the convent grounds. There was no interruption, said Sister Emily, in the students’ studies. The fire, it was later learned, was electrical in origin.

According to Sister Lorraine Connell, the cost to rebuild and replace is \$750,000. To date, \$500,000 has been raised or pledged, some coming from the sale of Sisters’ properties in provinces around the world, and some coming from individual donations, likewise from around the world. ■



Sister Kathleen Harmon
Sister Donna Jurick
Sister Patricia Loomer

NEW LEADERSHIP TEAM FOR OHIO

At their province-wide November Selection Assembly, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur of the Ohio Province chose **Sister Kathleen Harmon, Sister Donna Jurick and Sister Patricia Loomer** as the new Ohio Leadership Team, to take office June 13.

Sister Kathleen serves on the present leadership team, along with Sister Carol Lichtenberg, Sister Kristin Matthes and Sister Linda Soucek. Sister Kathleen will serve as the new provincial.

Sister Donna Jurick is the former executive vice president of St. Edwards University in Austin, Texas. Sister Patricia Loomer comes from the St. Mary’s HealthCare System in Athens, Georgia, where she served as vice president of Mission Services. ■

WE WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER



We are mindful that we stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us.

SISTER NANCY BONSHOCK SNDdeN

Formerly Robert Gail • April 22, 1947 – August 8, 2019

Sister Nancy taught history and social studies for 45 years, beginning at Little Flower High School in Philadelphia, PA. For the next two years, she served as teacher-in-residence at St. Michael's High School on a Navajo Reservation. In a letter home, she described it as "a living, breathing experience...a sharing of different cultures." For the next four decades, Sister Nancy taught at the Academy of Notre Dame in Villanova, PA, where her anthropology course was a student favorite. In her second "career," Sister Nancy served as pastoral minister at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital and volunteer pastoral visitor for her parish, St. John Chrysostom, practicing the compassion that only a wounded healer can offer.



SISTER MARY IRENE SPRALEY SNDdeN

October 4, 1925 – November 13, 2019

Sister Mary Irene was an elementary teacher and principal for 51 years. She was an active member of the parishes and enjoyed getting to know her students' families. After retiring from formal education, Sister Mary Irene provided clerical support at Mt. Notre Dame Health Center. She also participated in the Adopt-a-Sister program with Mt. Notre Dame High School where she accompanied a group of students from their sophomore through senior year and often stayed in touch long after that. Sister Mary Irene loved the outdoors and had an adventurous side. As a Golden Jubilarian, she made a pilgrimage to France and Belgium and treasured memories of that trip the rest of her life.



SISTER ALMA GROLLIG SNDdeN

Formerly Jeanne Therese • Oct. 5, 1932 – Oct. 20, 2019

With creativity and joy, Sister Alma taught grades three through eight as well as high school English and journalism. After nearly 40 years, Sister Alma served for several years as co-director of the Cincinnati Notre Dame AmeriCorps site. Her love of cooking led Sister Alma to work as a dietician for several communities, including the Mt. Notre Dame convent. Her final assignment was assisting in the Ohio Archives. Besides her official ministries, Sister Alma volunteered as a receptionist for Weight Watchers, was a member of The Holy Fools, a clown ministry group, and participated in the Adopt-A-Sister Program with students from Mt. Notre Dame High School.



SISTER ROSEMARIE POHLMAN SNDdeN

July 14, 1952 – November 21, 2019

Due to a hearing impairment, Sister Rosemarie's dream of being a classroom teacher was not realized for nearly 20 years. Upon receiving a M.A. in Deaf Education, she began teaching hearing-impaired children and continually sharpened her skills at American Sign Language to help those students who depended on one-on-one instruction through signing. Sister Rosemarie also participated in a ministry formation program for Catholic deaf adults and an American delegation to the International Catholic Deaf Association papal audience and pilgrimage. After retiring from teaching, she accepted a new challenge as province technology coordinator. Sister Rosemarie had a deep sense of the importance of words in relationships, beginning with her relationship with God.



SISTER ANNE THERESE WALSH SNDdeN

January 18, 1926 – October 27, 2019

Sister Anne Therese taught more than 40 years in a variety of grade levels at parochial schools in Ridgewood and Brooklyn, NY; Philadelphia and Huntington Valley, PA; Baltimore and Hyattsville, MD; and Washington, DC. Whatever the grade or the place, she loved, formed and delighted her young charges. Sisters and friends who knew Sister Anne Therese best remembered her with these words: friendship, singing, dancing, storytelling and fun. When asked about the source of her joyous energy, they responded, "That heart of hers — a heart that knew how to believe and how to love."



SISTER MARIE SHIELDS SNDdeN

February 7, 1938 – December 31, 2019

Sister Marie taught for 14 years in inner-city parish schools in Ohio. Then, with a Masters in Religious Studies, she joined Father Jim Smith, the pastor at St. Christopher Parish, and Father Richard Huelsman S.J. to form a pastoral team to administer to the parish. Sister Marie saw her work as simply helping and loving the people of the parish. She sparked parish support for a local food pantry and homeless shelter, for farm projects in Ghana and Ecuador, and for national social justice groups like Network, Pax Christi and Bread for the World. It was in that loving heart of her good God that Sister Marie held the people who were a part of her life.



SISTER MARGARET CLAYDON SNDdeN

July 19, 1923 – February 1, 2020

Sister Margaret began her teaching career at St. Hubert High School in Philadelphia and Trinity Preparatory School in Ilchester, MD, before being missioned to Trinity College in 1952. A constant thread in her teaching years was the fun and joy she experienced with her students. In 1958, she was named President of Trinity College. She took special pride in Trinity securing its own chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, the opening of a Master of Arts in Teaching program and new Continuing Education programs that reached out to women of non-traditional ages. The first half of her 16-year presidency was a time of immense growth and development, while during the later years, she negotiated innovative responses to major challenges in academia, the Church and society — all while keeping true to Trinity's mission. She retired from teaching in 2004 and left Trinity for Mount Notre Dame in 2015, where she cherished time with her Sisters.



SISTER FRANCES MARY OF THE SACRED HEART SCHOENUNG SNDdeN

June 22, 1930 – February 8, 2020

Sister Frances Mary began her teaching career in Villa Park, IL. She was known for a math technique that included students' cheers and a science technique that put information into song. In 1999, she received the Miami Valley Catholic Education Council Teacher of Excellence Award for her 46 years of teaching. For 25 summers, Sister Frances Mary and her twin, Sister Marguerite, organized field trips, arts and crafts programs, and reading and math tutoring at the Practical Family Living Center in Cincinnati's Millvale neighborhood. Sisters Frances Mary and Marguerite also shared a deep devotion to their niece, Francie. When Sister Frances Mary retired in 1999 until 2015, she tutored at Corryville Catholic.



FAITH IN ACTION

Judy and Ken Balaskovits, who have been married for 50 years, have always had a lot in common. They are both from the Chicago area, they are both only children and they were both firmly rooted in Catholic schools. Ken went to Weber High School and Judy graduated from Notre Dame High School for Girls. "We grew up devoted to our faith," Judy says. "We were blessed to have received such strong Catholic educations."

Judy has fond memories of her days at Notre Dame High School. "The Sisters were very giving and really cared about us," recalls Judy. She grew particularly close to her homeroom teacher Sr. Barbara Quinn, known as Sr. Joseph Julie in Judy's school days. "Sr. Barbara was so down to earth. She helped shape my spirituality in ways that have stayed with me my whole life," Judy says. "All the Sisters taught us to think outside of ourselves and be generous to others."



Over the years, Judy and Ken have volunteered in their parish (Ken teaches religious education, Judy has served on the liturgy committee, and they both help in the soup kitchen and sandwich-making ministry for the homeless). They have also actively supported the mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur.

"When one of our daughters moved to Cincinnati with her husband, we began to visit the Sisters there, and eventually reconnected with Sr. Barbara," Judy explains. "We learned more about their work with the underserved here and around the world." Judy and Ken started making monthly gifts, and decided to include the Sisters in their estate plans.

"Our first priority in our estate planning are our two daughters and three grandchildren," notes Ken. "But the Sisters have devoted their whole lives to God and His work. I have so much respect for them." Judy continues, "I feel contented about this gift to the Sisters in our will because I know their ministries are productive and God-centered. They are truly faith in action."

If you, like Judy and Ken, would like to link your legacy to the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, please consider a gift through your will or other estate plans. If you do so, please let us know so we can honor you in a special way. Notifying us not only gives us the opportunity to thank you, but we can also better plan to continue our work of bringing hope to the lives of poor children, women and families here and around the world.

For more information, confidentially and with no obligation, about ways you can continue to support the Sisters in your will and estate plans, contact Karen Hadden, Associate Development Director, at khadden@ohsnd.org or 513-679-8106.

Karen

KAREN HADDEN
Associate Director of Development





LET'S DO LUNCH!

We invite you to our 17th annual Partners in Action fundraising luncheon for friends of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur who live in the greater Cincinnati area.

Please join us as we gather on May 14 at the Cintas Center on the Xavier University campus.

This mission-based luncheon program begins promptly at noon and ends precisely at 1:00 p.m. The program will emphasize the educational work and mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in a variety of ministries.

Reservations are required by contacting Karen Hadden at 513-679-8106 or khadden@ohsnd.org.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS



Saturday, March 14

Live the Good Volunteers Feed 5000
Cincinnati, OH • Mt. Notre Dame Convent – Amiens Hall

Wednesday, March 18

Taizé Prayer Around the Cross, a Lenten Service
Cincinnati, OH • Mt. Notre Dame Convent Chapel

Saturday, May 2

Morning of Spirituality • Cincinnati, OH
Mt. Notre Dame Spirituality Center • *Presenter:*
Sister Marty Dermody, SC

Thursday, May 14

Partners in Action Luncheon • Cincinnati, OH
Cintas Center at Xavier University

Saturday, May 16

Live the Good Volunteers Feed 5000 • Cincinnati, OH
Mt. Notre Dame Convent – Amiens Hall

Saturday, June 6

Notre Dame High School Alumnae
Celebration • Chicago, IL • Crowne Plaza
Chicago-Northbrook

Wednesday, July 8 — Sunday, July 19

In the footsteps of St. Julie Pilgrimage to
Belgium and France

Saturday, July 18

Live the Good Volunteers Feed 5000 • Cincinnati, OH
Mt. Notre Dame Convent – Amiens Hall

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