

The background is a watercolor illustration. It features a circular window with a decorative, lattice-like pattern. Through the window, a stylized figure is visible, possibly representing a person or a symbol. The colors are soft and blended, with shades of green, yellow, and blue. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

*In Mission*  
*2024*

*Longing for the Oneness of*  
*All in God*

## In Mission 2024

Publication of the  
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Notre Dame

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Atlantic-Midwest Province (AM)  
[atlanticmidwest.org](http://atlanticmidwest.org)

Central Pacific Province (CP)  
[ssndcentralpacific.org](http://ssndcentralpacific.org)

AF, AM, CP Collaborative site  
[ssnd.org](http://ssnd.org)

Bavarian Province (BY)  
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Austria-Italy (OR-IT) and  
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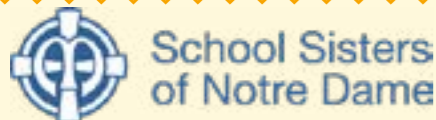
Polish Province (PO)  
[ssnd.pl](http://ssnd.pl)

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[notredamke.rkc.si](http://notredamke.rkc.si)

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Thank you!



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*In this publication you find the name of our foundress written in two different ways: Theresia and Theresa. The original name in German that she took at her perpetual vows is Theresia von Jesus. In many languages the name was changed to Theresa of Jesus. In honor of our foundational language, we are now using both versions. It is always the same person, the foundress of SSND.*

## LONGING FOR THE ONENESS IN GOD



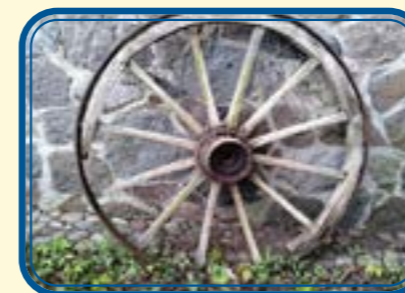
Sister M. Dominica Michalke, SSND

General Superior

Our recent General Chapter presented us, School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND), with the wonderful call to be witnesses of the oneness of all of creation and to never cease longing for the oneness in God.

The articles presented in this edition of *In Mission* show different aspects of how we try to respond to the call of our General Chapter. We read about education, restructuring into one new province, care of creation, reconciliation, communication .....

We live in a highly individualistic world that often values personal rights more highly than the common good or the right of my neighbors.



The spokes are individual elements of the wheel, each one is needed for the stability of the entire

wheel. They are held together by the outer circle which gives them strength and makes them one piece, one wheel rather than many elements. The hub unites all the spokes in the middle of the wheel and connects the wheel with the cart or the wagon.

The closer you move on one spoke toward the center, the closer you are to the other spokes.



Our center of oneness is clearly God whom we follow with our lives in mission. In the celebration of Eucharist, we find ourselves strengthened by Jesus Christ, connected by the Spirit and called by the Creator of all life. Eucharist is

the driving power of our oneness. As God became one with us in Jesus Christ, so we become one in giving our lives for the mission of God. In Eucharistic celebration, adoration, and in daily life we long for peace, reconciliation, unity, oneness. Each SSND is called to witness to this precious gift for our world.

With the contributions to this publication, we share some spokes of our longing for oneness in God. Unity is at the center of our charism inherited by our foundress, Theresia of Jesus Gerhardinger, unity of heart and mind. Oneness means that unity among ourselves pours out to all humanity and all creation because God is the creator of all. In gratitude, we trust that the wheel of life will roll on and move us and those whom we serve to an even deeper understanding of that oneness, a gift of our Triune God.

# PROCESS TOWARDS ONE EUROPE

by Sister M. Monika Schmidt, SSND, Provincial Leader, Bavarian Province

Mother Theresia, who longed for the unity of all in God, struggled for it and urged her sisters to seek unity because it makes us strong. She had experience of how wars destroy a country permanently, shatter values, shake the foundations of peaceful coexistence and reinforce divisions.



By founding the Congregation of SSND, Mother Theresia sought to respond to the manifold hardships caused by the Napoleonic Wars (1799-1815) throughout Europe. She was convinced that society could be transformed through Christian education. In order

to be more independent of national borders and different regulations in territories and dioceses, Theresia Gerhardinger placed the Congregation under central leadership.

The history of Europe is reflected in the foundation and history of our European provinces, particularly in the conflicts and wars of the 19th and 20th centuries: the Wars of Liberation as a counter-reaction to Napoleon, the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, the First World War, the political restructuring of Europe through the Paris Suburb Treaties, the Second World War and the establishment of the Iron Curtain. The wars not only brought destruction, poverty, atrocities and targeted extermination, but also shifted borders and displaced peoples.

Traumatization, uprooting, injuries and resentment remain until today.

But we would not be SSNDs in the sense of our foundress if we stopped there. We are united by Mother Theresia's charism, our mission to lead people to God and to create unity among ourselves, to transform the world through educating by our being and actions. In this self-image, we School Sisters have always responded to reality and reacted flexibly.

The demographic development of the European provinces today shows us that we are all experiencing the same challenges. The digital world enables us to network more closely.



Driven by the desire to be more closely united and thus send a strong signal to the divided world, we European provinces set out together in 2019 on

the path to ONE Europe. We are well aware of the difficulties: differences in civil law, in political situations and in cultures. Additionally, we speak eight different languages.

But we are engaged in getting to know each other better through PowerPoint presentations, sharing information, meetings and, in 2023, the gathering, Embracing Unity, of the younger sisters of Europe. The Europe Committee initiated a prayer network and developed a model for leadership in the ONE Europe according to

the guidelines of the provincial leaders. The European provincial councils are working on the clarification of the details.

We are on our way, and even if we do not yet know all the steps, we do have a common vision.

*Sister M. Karmen Balgač, Provincial, Slovenian Province:* The Sisters of the Slovenian Province firmly trust in the words of Mother Theresia also in relation to One Europe: *What lies in the future is in God's hands.* We endeavor to pray steadfastly for the project and to turn constructively to our tasks.

*Sister M. Rut Koprucha, Provincial, Polish Province:* Coming closer to one another and building unity takes place through personal encounter. A sign of our unity was for us the meeting Embracing Unity, which helped us to develop closer relations among us.

*Sister M. Vojtěcha Honová, District Leader, District of Czechoslovakia:* In the last 10 years, we have undergone a process of structural change. First of all, we merged with the province of Austria-Italy and two years ago we joined the Bavarian Province as a district. We have had positive experiences with this process. The mutual trust in God's guidance and the willingness to cooperate with the sisters of both provinces have freed us from fears and uncertainties and united us.

We have experienced mutual openness, helpfulness, benevolent welcome and equal treatment. On the way to a common Europe, we want to remain open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to find a common path in faith and trust.

*Sister M. Verena Wittibschlager, District of Austria-Italy, member of the EU-Committee:* In Europe, we SSNDs will only be a small group in 2025. This completely new situation challenges us TODAY to abandon good, established structures and to radically think about new ways. Our efforts in the "One Europe" committee were certainly marked by this and at the same time not always easy. The "name" (One Europe) that characterizes us as "Poor School Sisters" in our divided and endangered world will be significant in this process.

*Sister M. Angela Hatwiger, Bavarian Province, member of the EU-Committee:* The meetings in our committee for growing together into ONE Europe were always characterized by great openness, sincerity and mutual appreciation. In our joint search we developed a leadership model that takes into account the guidelines of the provincial leadership and the demographic development and at the same time offers opportunities to carry Mother Theresia's charism into the future.



Embracing unity

# WE STRIVE TO BE WITNESSES OF UNIVERSAL COMMUNION

by Sisters Marinez Capra, SSND, International Shalom Network Coordinator and Beatriz Martínez-García, SSND, UN-NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) Representative

Since 2000, we have witnessed that millions of people have been born, raised, lived, and died in refugee camps due to prolonged internal and international armed conflicts, natural, and human-made disasters, or climate change. In addition, the complexity of the phenomenon of forced mass migration has left millions of people adrift, homeless, and jobless, at the mercy of unscrupulous individuals or corporations who exploit them for personal gain. Even more, our planet's water, soil, and air have become more polluted.

We want to share the aspirations, goals, and commitments that the *Shalom* Network and UN-NGO ministries are highlighting in response to the Call of the 25th General Chapter to address the cry of the Earth and its people to work and live towards bringing about universal communion.

These goals and commitments focus on: *healing divisions and fractured relationships; furthering systemic change; being present with the people on the peripheries; collaborating to end all forms of discrimination, inequality, and violence; and addressing the environmental and humanitarian crisis in light of an integral ecology as a Laudato Si' Congregation.*

These commitments are lived out in all places where we live and serve. We see these in the testimonies that our sisters and associates shared in the Solidarity Reflections and the *Shalom*/UN-NGO Newsletters, available on our congregational website (Gerhardinger.org); the *Shalom* Branch Meetings and any other small or large gathering. In addition, we collaborate with international organizations such as Talitha Kum, Africa-Europe Faith and Justice Network, Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Working Groups, and NGO Committees associated with the United Nations. We join efforts to advocate for and with the vulnerable. We work, in hope, toward a systemic change that may lead us to universal communion.



"Trinity of Life" by Sister Ana Graça Bessan, AGB, Italian missionary in Bahia, Brazil



Sisters Regina Kabayama (rear center) and Virginia Klesner (rear right), Liturgical Fabric Arts, Sancta Maria in Ripa, St. Louis, Missouri, USA, teach students from Mount Mary University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA, how to make church garments and banners.

## EDUCATORS IN ALL WE DO

by Trudy Hamilton, Director of Communications, Central Pacific Province

The School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) North America encompasses the Atlantic-Midwest Province (AM) and the Central Pacific Province (CP). CP Sisters live and minister in 47 dioceses, 22 U.S. states, Ghana, Guam, Italy, Japan and Kenya.

AM Sisters live and minister in 26 dioceses, 12 U.S. states, three Canadian provinces and England.

Both provinces sponsor multiple education and social service ministries. In the areas of traditional education, AM sponsors a university, high schools and middle schools. CP sponsors universities, high schools, elementary schools and a school for students with developmental disabilities. In both provinces, Sisters minister in a variety of social service and spiritual care roles in parishes and schools, as tutors, hospital chaplains, lawyers, facilitators, retreat and spiritual directors, in job training, at food banks, and in loving service to others through prayer and presence.

"First and foremost, SSNDs are educators in all we do," said Sister Debra Marie Sciano, Provincial Leader, CP. "Education is how we live out our daily longing for the oneness of all in God."

Sister Paula Dukehart, AM Provincial Councilor, added, "Our mission calls us to seek God's will. We know that includes struggling for unity throughout our international community and with those we serve. The word of God and our focus on education in all its many forms is what ties us together."

During SSND's recent General Chapter, the delegates authorized the General Council to establish a Global Education Commission that will give life to the SSND educational vision for these times. This will be a multicultural commission focused on education in the spirit of Blessed Theresa, looking at human development and environmental sustainability, which are critical for the transformation of our world.

“It is so important we are educators with a worldview,” said Sister Paula. “This education commission will explore concrete avenues to eliminate root causes of injustice through education,” added Sister Debra.

Sisters Debra and Paula shared how AM and CP are connecting across the provinces, especially North America and Asia/Pacific, by rebuilding relationships among the three universities in Baltimore, Maryland, USA, Kyoto, Japan and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA.

For the Sisters in AM and CP Provinces today, that collaboration takes many forms including interprovincial visits by students and educators, annual leadership meetings, sharing resources, collaborating and delegating responsibilities.

“We’re looking at short-term and long-term possibilities,” said Sister Debra. “Just recently, Japanese students from Kyoto Notre Dame Jogakuin Jr. and Sr. High School, Kyoto, Japan, visited St. Louis, Missouri, USA, to spend time with Notre Dame High School students and to learn the history of Sancta Maria in Ripa, St. Louis,” shared Sister Debra.

“This is looking at our SSND mission in new ways,” said Sister Paula. “We are one congregation, and our borders are melting away.”

Sister Debra agreed, “This is bigger than schools. It’s about how we view and understand this new reality and how we address the emerging urgent needs of today across the congregation and close to home.”



An artistic representation of Blessed Theresa from Japan



Sister Carol Marie Wildt, archivist, shares the history of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in St. Louis, Missouri in the Heritage Room at Sancta Maria in Ripa, St. Louis with students from Notre Dame Jogakuin Jr. and Sr. High School, Kyoto, Japan.

## STRUGGLING FOR RECONCILIATION AND FORGIVENESS

by Sister M. Andrea Ivanics, SSND, Provincial Leader, Hungarian Province



Sisters of the Hungarian Province

The Sister of the Hungarian Province in active ministry have courageously engaged in a reflective and professionally led future planning process. Through this process we have come to realize that our common future will only bear fruit, and we will only respond authentically to God’s call and hear the cry of the world if we face, both personally and communally, the fact that we have inflicted many wounds on each other.

We recognize that reconciliation is complicated by many things. Coming to terms with the historical past is still in progress; we are still learning dialogue as a way of life, and we are at different places in our personal growth and development. We have realized that we are strongly defined by our traditions; we need courage and clarity to let go of what no longer is life-giving.

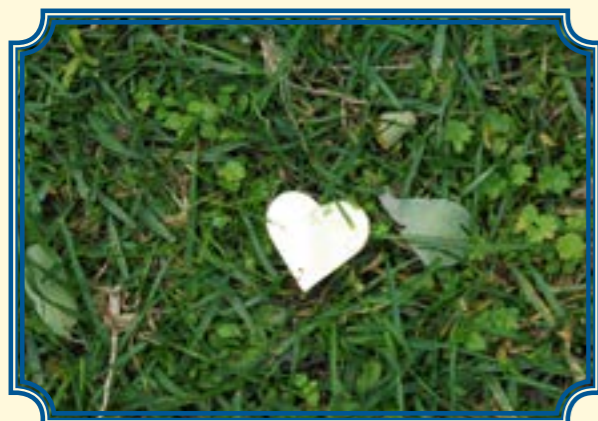


As School Sisters, we need to remember again and again the words of our Constitution: “We struggle for reconciliation and unity wherever we are.” (*You Are Sent*, Constitution 35).



Throughout the numerous meetings of our future planning process we have had to admit honestly that we can only take small steps on the road to reconciliation. It is important to rekindle our desire for reconciliation and forgiveness. “Amid the diversity which exists in our church and in our world, our continuous striving for unity in our faith communities is a valuable witness.” (*You Are Sent*, General Directory 10).

We must believe that we are able to work together with an open heart, listening to each other’s insights. We must not give up our desire to build a community that is vital for our personal development and spiritual growth, protects our mental health and stirs our creativity. Our Constitution says: “We choose ways of being and interacting in community which enable us to become the persons God created us to be.” (*You Are Sent*, Constituion 45).



From the process that has been going on for the past two years, I would like to highlight two events that we have experienced together, which have served reconciliation in our province.

On one occasion, we expressed in a simple but powerful ritual that we welcome and embrace each other’s reality. This ritual has helped us to see that anticipated trust, the experience of being accepted can give us the courage to step onto the path of reconciliation, to grow in openness and goodwill towards each other.

At another occasion, we reflected together, taking into account our personal and communal realities, and we formulated some norms which strengthen relationships in community. We also said that we want to remind primarily ourselves to follow these norms.

Again and again, we remind ourselves that even among religious trust builds up slowly and dissipates quickly, but we must not give up our fundamental striving to support and challenge one another. “Together we continue Christ’s mission.” (*You Are Sent*, Constitution 12)

***In unity is our strength;  
therefore, we must hold to this anchor above all.***

***Blessed Theresa -  
Letter 4980***

## ON THE ROAD TO UNIVERSAL COMMUNION

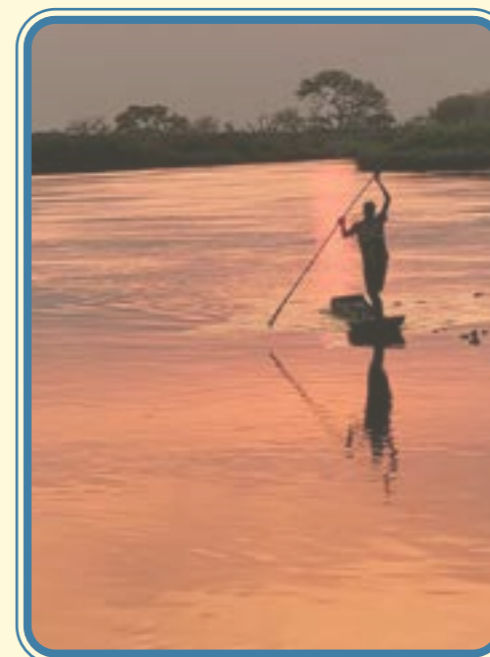
*by Sister Susana Guadalupe Tomatti, SSND, School Minister, Argentina,  
Province of Latin America and the Caribbean*

In both *Fratelli Tutti* and *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis calls us to dream as one humanity and live the Gospel of Creation.

In universal communion, every human group finds its beauty. A change of direction is necessary to take the path that leads to closeness and the culture of encounter. We recognize ourselves as brothers and sisters because we are children of a single Creator and aware that in a globalized and interconnected

world we can only be saved together. We must overcome barriers and differences, and realize that the common element of all men and women is equal dignity.

“All Brothers,” wrote St. Francis of Assisi, to address all brothers and sisters, and to propose to them a way of life with a Gospel flavor: that



*South Sudan  
photo: Sister Anna Marie Reha, SSND*

happiness is in those who love the other, the brother/sister who is far away and the one who is near; an open fraternity, which recognizes, values and loves each person.

The human being is the image of God and the whole universe is a language of God’s love, of God’s great affection for us. Everything is God’s caress. When we become aware of the reflection of God in everything that exists, the heart experiences the desire to adore the Lord for all God’s creatures and to live deeply the Gospel of Creation.

“A universal communion,” created by the same Father, unites all beings in the universe by invisible bonds. It forms a sublime communion of tenderness, compassion and concern for all of creation.

When the heart is authentically open to universal communion, nothing and no one is excluded from this community. Peace, justice and the preservation of creation are intimately linked.

All human beings are together as brothers and sisters in a marvelous pilgrimage, intertwined by the love that God has for all creatures and a love that also unites us, with tender affection, to brother sun, sister moon and mother earth.





*Philanthropic group visits the children's department*

## **EMBRACING ALL AS ONE IN GOD'S MISSION**

*by Sister Evelyn Adondiwo, SSND, Caregiver, Orthopaedic Training Centre, Ghana, Province of Africa*

In a world filled with division and discord, there is a deep yearning for unity. This longing for oneness is not a desire for superficial peace, but a profound yearning for the interconnectedness of all in God.

I have an attraction in my heart for people who are born with deformities or with disabilities caused by nature, accident, abuse and war.

When I walk through the center for children at the Orthopedic Training Center, here in Adoagyir Nsawam, Ghana, I feel the spread of positive energy among the people I encounter each day.

I am drawn to see beyond our physical differences and recognize the common thread that unites us as God's children.

Embracing unity in God requires Christian virtues. It's a call to embrace a spirit of collaboration. In ministry, I encounter how society exhibits great resentment toward people with different ability. I believe there is a need for equity and compassion, so we don't make people scared and uncomfortable. Many of us have not been taught how to relate compassionately to those who are "different" from what we consider to be the "normal" way to look and act. We lack the desire to spend quality time with one another. For me this is where we as individuals, community, ministry partners, church and nations are failing.

We continue to discriminate, show prejudice,



*Sister Evelyn with Ama and Kareen.*

and have rules that are condescending to the differently abled. This behavior is splitting our society as we sometimes love and value material things over people created in God's image and likeness.

The encounter of the disciples in the waiting room on Pentecost reveals that engaging in spiritual fellowship provides support and encouragement in the journey toward oneness. The disciples persevered, they were committed to prayer, they shared their encounters, loved and accepted each person. This was their bond.

My ministry has taught me that compassion is the

ability to care unconditionally for another person, not based on fulfilling personal expectations.

From my experience of a short illness, I know the healing that comes with being loved and cared for when in pain. Therefore, I strive to be patient and inclusive in my relationship with children and vulnerable adults. I am so grateful for the gift of fortitude, and the capacity to create a systemic change.

May we be open in embracing the transformative power of unity in God. Let us walk together on this journey towards wholeness, knowing that we are all interconnected in the divine web of life.



*Fun time with the Kitchen Staff*

***We must all responsibly cherish God's work.***

***Blessed Theresa - Letter 5025***

# CONGREGATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY TEAM

by Sister Maria Iannuccillo, SSND Congregational Communications Coordinator



The Congregational Communications and Technology Team (CCTT) has been working together for several years. Together, one or two representatives from each of the eight SSND provinces (SSNDs and lay women and men), the webmaster and the congregational communications coordinator meet monthly via Zoom to share ideas, plan and implement projects for the congregation.

The CCTT members gave extra time for the pre-Chapter and General Chapter work, helping to connect Sisters and Associates throughout the congregation, offering 12 hours of prayer

on Zoom including time at the tomb of Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger, etc.

I have been fortunate to serve with the CCTT since beginning this ministry in August of 2022. I quickly learned of their gifts and talents and of their willingness to share them for the good of the congregation. Together, we form an international, multicultural and multilingual workgroup, offering expertise and support across continents, languages and cultures. We strive to strengthen our congregation's understanding and efforts to live interculturally.

The following two quotes highlight the experience of being part of the CCTT.

"It is an honor to serve on the Congregational Communications and Technology Team," said Trudy Hamilton, Director of Communications, Central Pacific Province, United States. "Working with communicators from around the world, both religious and lay people, is a highlight of my career. I have learned so much from others on the team, not only about communications, but also about interculturality. I recently had the opportunity to spend time with a fellow team member from the Province of Africa. When we met at the airport, we were already friends!"

Sister Mirian de Medeiros, SSND, teacher and translator for the Province of Latin America and the Caribbean, Brazil said: "It's a grace and a gift to be part of this group. The group has helped me to open my mind and heart to the reality of different aspects of the congregation."



*Reconnecting with the treasures of our sacred history  
Moving forward into a future in the Mission of the Triune God*



CCTT Members meet monthly via Zoom

**Nine Year Novena  
in preparation for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of SSND**

Beginning on 24 October 2024, the School Sisters will pray a Nine Year Novena leading to the year 2033 when they celebrate 200 years since the founding of SSND. Each year has a specific topic and focus.

For more Information: [www.gerhardinger.org](http://www.gerhardinger.org)



# ***Transforming the world through education***

## ***School Sisters of Notre Dame are in mission in 27 countries:***

- \* Argentina \* Austria \* Belarus \* Brazil \* Canada \* Czech Republic \* England
- \* Germany \* Ghana \* Guam \* Honduras \* Hungary \* Italy \* Japan
- \* Kenya \* Nigeria \* Paraguay \* Peru
- \* Poland \* Puerto Rico \* Romania \* Serbia
- \* Sierra Leone \* Slovenia \* South Sudan \* The Gambia
- \* United States of America



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