

Carriers *of the* Vision

SCHOOL SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME

Stewardship Report 2013 • Atlantic-Midwest Province

Witness to *God's* love in our world



On the cover: Five women across the Atlantic-Midwest Province are highlighted as carriers of the vision in this latest SSND Stewardship Report. They are (clockwise from upper left) Suzanne Blackburn, Jean Fredricks, Leah Benzing, Rochelle Sims and Stacey Hyatt.



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January 2014

Dear Friends and Partners in Ministry,

Many blessings as we continue to celebrate the gift of Jesus Christ, the Word who came among us and showed us the way to love. In the Constitution of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, we are called to make Christ visible by our very being, by sharing our love, faith and hope. None of us do this perfectly, but we strive to follow Christ as best we can. We are grateful for your support and love.

By our Baptism we all share in Christ's mission to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom. Wherever we are, whatever we are doing, we are called to be Christ. We need each other for support and accompaniment. In this Stewardship Report, we share with you the stories of five women who proclaim the good news and continue the vision of SSND.

I believe that each of you in your own way does his/her best to witness to God's love in our world. You make Christ visible. I invite you to take time to reflect on how you do that and to name those who give you hope because they make Christ visible. Let us give thanks for the gifts of faith and love. Let us embrace our God who loves us unconditionally.

Special thanks to Jean, Leah, Stacey, Rochelle and Suzanne for sharing a little of their story with us.

God's grace is abundant. Thank you for your continued support of our sisters and ministries. You are in our prayers daily.

Peace,

Kathleen Cornell, SSND
Provincial Leader
kcornell@amssnd.org

■ Mission

CHARISM / SPIRIT / TRANSFORMING THE WORLD THROUGH EDUCATION



Jean Fredricks teaches pre-K children at Caroline House in Bridgeport, Conn.

Carriers *of the* Vision

The year 2013 marked 180 years since Mary Theresa Gerhardinger of Bavaria founded the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

Blessed Theresa's charism still resonates today



Among the first SSNDs to accompany Mother Theresa to North America were Sister Caroline Friess (center) and four other SSNDs, captured in this rare photo of the pioneering teachers.

Passionately believing that the education of girls and women could transform the Church and the world and longing for the oneness of all in God, Theresa came to North America with a small band of missionaries in the 1840s to work in the burgeoning parish school system. By 1892, Sister Caroline Friess, Theresa's choice to lead the American mission, had founded about 300 parish schools and received 3,000 School Sisters into the congregation.

Much has changed in formal education since those early years, and the SSND ministries carried out in the name of education that transforms have evolved over time. But the mission and spirit of SSND have not changed. School Sisters would say that is because the "gift" — the SSND charism — endures. That gift of the Holy Spirit — the SSND way

of living the Gospel, the desire of Jesus that "all may be one" — was embodied in their [now] Blessed Theresa. Their renewed Constitution, *You Are Sent*, describes her as "a woman of faith, ever seeking God's will, who struggled for unity in her international community and responded to urgent needs, preferring the poor and educating with a world vision."

Blessed Theresa's charism still resonates with many persons today. When that sense of connection is strongest, a woman may choose vowed life as a sister. For others, the spark might lead them to an associate relationship with the community, in which they live out the unifying mission of Jesus in their single or married lives, their work, their relationships. Still others, such as students, might feel the connec-

tion unconsciously, as recipients of the gift from SSND teachers. Later, as alumnae, they become carriers of the charisma as they live what they learned from the women who had a profound impact on them.

Other “carriers” might be staff members who stumbled on the gift as SSND employees and found it resonated with them in a way no earlier position ever had. Perhaps a health care worker whose specialty is geriatrics finally feels at home when she is caring for elderly SSNDs in their environment. Still others, like lay teachers in SSND-founded schools, carry on the tradition they inherited from sister educators, while lay persons who head SSND-sponsored institutions are daily living out the identity and mission of the congregation. Even parish volunteers serving alongside SSNDs in parish ministry or outreach to the poor adopt Blessed Theresa’s spirit of oneness.

‘We are all equal, truly creations of God.’

For **Jean Fredricks**, of Stratford, Conn., her first connection to SSND was through Sister Pat Wachter, then director of religious education at Jean’s local parish, who told her of a nursing position at Villa Notre Dame in Wilton, Conn. Jean subsequently spent seven years at VND caring for the sisters living there. “It was while working there that I heard about the Associate Program and knew it was something I wanted in my life,” she says. She and her husband, Lance, have been SSND associates for more than 20 years. “It has been a wonderful time to grow in our spiritual and prayer life,” she says.

After returning to school to study early childhood education and working at a small center for several years, Jean began teaching pre-K children at Caroline House, an SSND-sponsored institution



Jean Fredricks, an SSND associate for more than 20 years, “fell in love with the children” at Caroline House.

offering classes in English and social skills to poor, mostly Hispanic women and their children in Bridgeport, Conn. “I fell in love with the children and felt it was truly the work that I should be doing,” she says.

“The sisters and I have the unique opportunity to foster Mother Theresa’s charisma that ‘all will be one,’” says Jean. “We spend our days with a very diverse group of women and children, many of whom would never spend time with one another without Caroline

House. Everyone there soon realizes we are all equal, truly creations of God.”

Students’ potential has no limits

Leah Benzing was taught by SSNDs from kindergarten through grade 12 at a parish school and the Institute of Notre Dame high school. She continued her SSND experience at Notre Dame of Maryland University, where she worked for 11 years, studied education



Leah Benzing with students from Mother Seton Academy in Baltimore, Md.

and is now working toward her master's. Today she teaches 6th-graders at Mother Seton Academy, a middle school for disadvantaged Baltimore children co-sponsored by SSND and five other religious congregations. Mother Theresa's charism and Leah's philosophy are inseparable. The principle that she adopted at IND — that one is expected to do her best and in doing just that can effect great transformation — is the same one she imparts to her students.

"At Mother Seton Academy, we create a safe environment for students to test their limits, learn to succeed



Stacey Hyatt (right) and Sister Cecilia Reitzel at Notre Dame Convent in Waterdown, Ontario.

gracefully and experience failures as a tool for learning, not an excuse for giving up. We try to help our students see that their potential has no limits. . . . By opening their minds to more of the world than they have ever known or imagined, we prepare them for high school, college and careers. They will be transformed and will be able to transform their families, their neighborhoods, their world."

Sisters' strength inspires, enriches

For **Stacey Hyatt**, a non-Catholic with no prior knowledge of SSND, coming to work for the School Sisters at Notre Dame Convent in Waterdown, Ontario, as a recreation specialist was an enlightening experience. She read *You Are Sent*, spent time in the archives room and soaked up the sisters' personal stories as she got to know them. "From the sisters' strength and example I have gained perspective on life situations that I have carried over into my personal and family life," she says. Today, 10 years later, her job as Personal Development in Community coordinator and volunteer resource coordinator is broad-reaching. She arranges spiritual and educational programs, contracts with guest

speakers, runs recreational outings and even takes sisters shopping.

"To be a staff member of SSND has been a very enriching journey for me and allowed me to be open to my own spirituality," says Stacey. "The strength of the women that I work with seems to just spread out to whomever they are around. That strength is something that Theresa Gerhardinger showed in her path to transform the world through the education of girls and women. I think that SSNDs exude that strength, and anyone being fortunate to be open to receive can't help but take it in and follow it in their day-to-day life."

'I felt nothing but love from them.'



Counselor Rochelle Sims (left) gives back to SisterHouse in Chicago where she was first embraced 21 years ago.

Rochelle Sims, an addictions counselor, program director and SSND associate, has been affiliated with SisterHouse in Chicago for 21 years. But her first year at the temporary home for women recovering from substance abuse was spent in residence, as a recovering alcohol and drug addict. Her personal turnaround at the hands of the SSNDs at SisterHouse has been her inspiration to stay on and give back to other women in conflict. "When I



Suzanne Blackburn shares a moment in the library with two students at St. Mary's High School in Annapolis, Md.

first met SSNDs Sr. Frances Lawrence and Sr. Gilmery Lemberg, I felt nothing but love from them. They treated me with respect, and I was told that I could have a better life and become a better person — which I thought wasn't possible. But they had faith in me and believed in me and helped me to become motivated." With the sisters' help, Rochelle returned to school, earned her certification in addictions counseling and now embraces others as she was embraced — "with respect and unconditional love."

"I have learned so much just by being in the presence of SSND," says Rochelle. In her eyes, Rochelle is living the mission of Mother Theresa — helping to empower women to reach their full potential, just as she was empowered many years ago.

' . . . the charism was for me, too.'

Suzanne Blackburn's association with the School Sisters is lifelong. Taught by SSND in elementary

school, she later entered the community after high school, then left in 1981. She has taught with SSNDs as a sister or as a laywoman for nearly 40 years, currently as a teacher/librarian at St. Mary's High School in Annapolis, Md. In 2003, she became an SSND associate.

"I have an SSND way of looking at the world," she says. "When I decided to enter the pre-associate program, in many ways it was like coming home. I had had a notion that associates supported sisters in their living of the charism. I remember the day it dawned on me that the charism was for me, too." She says that the teachings of Blessed Theresa and Mother Caroline — that embracing diversity strengthens unity and that the world can be transformed through education — and the stories of those who lived out those teachings have informed her vocation as a teacher.

"I've always loved the description of Mother Theresa as an 'educator with a global vision.' It is that vision that I hope to share with my students. I picture Mother Theresa gazing at the world with love, desiring to heal divisions, to build community, to make one. We need her vision more than ever today. We who are drawn to the SSND charism dare to believe that we can be channels of that vision." ■

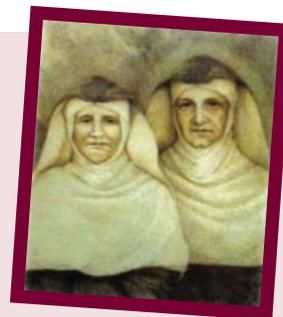
LEARN / VOLUNTEER / GIVE

How you can share in the SSND charism

- 1 **Learn** more about becoming a School Sister of Notre Dame. Women have responded to God's call to dedicate their lives to prayer, ministry and community and to make a difference in the lives of others. Go to <http://www.ssnd.org/become-sister>.
- 2 **Find out** more about the SSND Associate Program in which lay persons promise to live out the unifying mission of Jesus Christ in the spirit of Blessed Theresa Gerhardinger in their work, relationships and daily

lives. Visit http://atlanticmidwest.org/become_an_associate.html.

- 3 **Volunteer** at an SSND-sponsored institution, a school served by SSND, a health-care center or our Mission Advancement Office. Learn more about becoming part of a larger community doing God's work to benefit the common good. Call 800-993-7763.
- 4 **Share** your talents in promoting justice, peace and the integrity of creation in the world. Learn about SSND-supported efforts to support



immigrants, end human trafficking, promote sustainable environments and safeguard the earth. Go to <http://www.ssnd.org/ministries/shalom> to learn more.

- 5 **Make a donation** to support sisters and their ministries at http://atlanticmidwest.org/ways_to_make_gifts.html

2012-2013 Stewardship Financial Information

In 2013, the School Sisters of Notre Dame, an international congregation of women religious with more than 3,000 members, served in more than 30 countries around the world. (See the map below for our locations.)

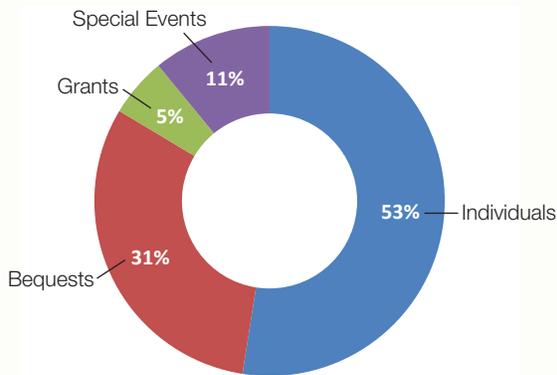
The Atlantic-Midwest Province, one of 10 provinces that make up the congregation, is itself an international provincial faith community. It includes nearly 600 SSNDs serving in more than 45 dioceses in six countries — United States, Canada, England, South Sudan, Switzerland and Italy.

The sisters remain dedicated to the belief that the world can be transformed through education. In addition to the classroom, SSNDs serve in parish ministry, pastoral care and spiritual direction, health care settings, job training centers and facilities for the homeless — wherever the greatest need calls them. In all cases, our sisters are women of prayer and seekers of social justice. You, our generous benefactors, family and friends, are our partners in ministry and mission.

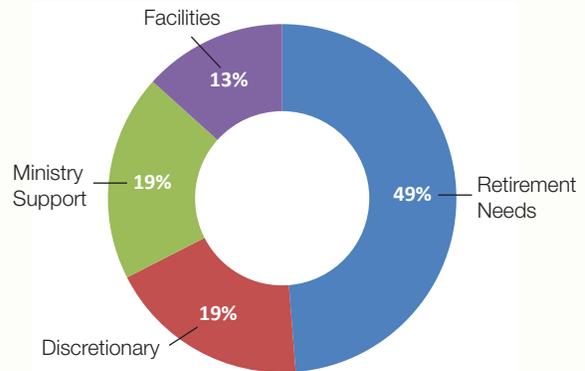
“United and content with little we go out into the whole world” because “LOVE cannot wait!”

Directional Statement of the 23rd General Chapter

Sources of Gift Income



How Gifts Were Used



Individuals	\$710,062
Bequests	\$421,215
Special Events	\$148,075
Grants	\$ 73,900
Total:	\$1,353,252

Retirement Needs	\$659,851
Discretionary	\$259,734
Ministry Support	\$253,374
Facilities	\$180,293
Total:	\$1,353,252





School Sisters of Notre Dame

Atlantic-Midwest Province

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School Reunion

Were you educated by
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Please join us in
celebrating our 180th Anniversary
as a congregation!

- ✓ Hear about SSND today
- ✓ See former classmates and teachers
- ✓ Reminisce & share photos

Call Sr. Leonora
(800) 993-7763

Touched by Love



Dear Friends,

Our School Sisters of Notre Dame are joyfully celebrating their 180th anniversary. The congregation traces its beginning to Oct. 24, 1833, in Bavaria, Germany, when Mary Theresa Gerhardinger, our foundress, began teaching poor school children. Today, School Sisters continue in the mysterious interaction of God's call and their human response. They continue to live and work in ways that reveal God's love as they further Christ's mission through their ministry as educators.

Many of you who have been touched by our School Sisters' love — whether in school, parish ministry or spiritual direction, or as a family member or co-worker — now foster qualities of leadership which enable you to exert a Christian influence on society. Your leadership, in turn, affirms and supports the Sisters' desire to respond to urgent needs today.

Thank you for partnering with us. Each of you is an important part of our international community of faith. Your prayers, financial contributions and volunteerism are all essential to the future of the SSND mission and ministries, because our Sisters cannot do it alone.

I hope you enjoy this issue of our Stewardship Report as we highlight individuals whose lives have been touched by SSND.

With sincere gratitude,

Leslie A. Lopez, JD
Director of Mission Advancement