

# UNITED IN MISSION

ATLANTIC-MIDWEST PROVINCE

Transforming the world through education

Winter 2025

“Go and Do likewise.”

## *Living Relationship through Sponsorship*

**As you know**, relationships are at the heart of the SSND mission and permeate everything SSND embodies and stands for. The SSND charism, gift of the Spirit, flows from the spiritual heritage and gift of St. Augustine, “who formed a community to be of one heart and one soul in God, seeing in the Trinity the basis, source and goal of all community” (Prologue, *You Are Sent*).

Community, and thus relationship, at SSND today is both lived among the Sisters and is institutionalized and witnessed in and through our sponsored and co-sponsored ministries. That relationship between the ministry and the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Atlantic-Midwest Province is referred to as sponsorship, in which SSND is the sponsoring congregation (sponsor) and the ministry is the sponsored or co-sponsored ministry. Sponsorship is responsible for ensuring that the ministry will endure and flourish into the foreseeable future. Intrinsic in this relationship is that both the sponsor and the sponsored/co-sponsored ministry are rooted in the Catholic faith tradition and therefore the organization or institution is a ministry of the Catholic Church.

There are many ways to organize this sponsorship relationship. As of July 1st, our province embraced a new way of relating to our sponsored ministries. A Sponsor Council was put in place, to better nurture this relationship and to support the mission of the respective sponsored ministry by supporting the work of governance and assuring that formation for mission is made available. Therefore, it is essential, that there is a common understanding between SSND as sponsor, the Sponsor Council and mission formation, about how Catholic identity and God’s mission in the SSND spirit are lived out and shared with the various stakeholders.



**Back, L-R:** Council Liaison to Sponsorship, Nancy Gilchriest, SSND, Sponsor Council Members Steve Cheeseman, Mary Anne O'Donnell, Carole Shinnick, SSND, and Provincial Leader, Charmaine Krohe, SSND  
**Front, L-R:** Director of Mission Formation, Yvonne DeBruin, Sponsor Council Members Delia Dowling, SSND (Chair), Gary Thrift and Kathy Sipes

This issue will briefly introduce our new Sponsor Council members, including its chair, Sister Delia Dowling, SSND. Since July, the members began to build this vital relationship by visiting the ministries and learning about how each in its own way is transforming the world through education. With this new relationship, the province seeks to grow the sustainability of each of our ministries by supporting the Mission. This includes creating an environment that invites the spiritual dimension (Cont'd)

## Introduction, Continued

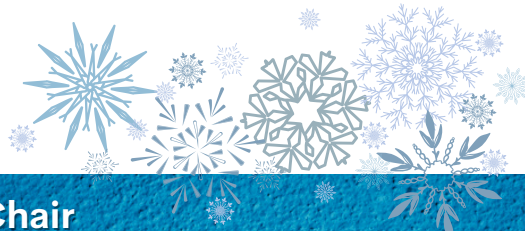
in all aspects of administration, programming/curriculum, management, operations, governance and mission.

Sponsorship in a deeper sense is an instrument to exercise not only the ministry of education, but also the ministry of mercy. I recall the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), who stopped on the road to care for a person who was victimized. As Jesus told this parable to his disciples, he instructed them to 'Go and do likewise'. With sponsorship, we live intentionally into this call and responsibility.

Enjoy meeting our new Sponsor Council. In their own words, some of them reflect on the phrase from *You Are Sent* which echoes in the Call of the 25th General Chapter - *We are Educators in all that we do*. Together we look with excitement and hopeful anticipation for the ministry of sponsorship into the new year!

Happy New Year!

  
Yvonne DeBruin  
Director, Mission Formation



### Sister Delia Dowling, SSND, Chair

A seasoned educator and administrator, Sister Delia brings experience as a high school teacher, university faculty member, and Academic Dean at College of Notre Dame of Maryland (now university). She directed a feasibility study for a new school in southwest Baltimore that became Sisters Academy of Baltimore, co-sponsored by SSND with three other religious communities of women. Sister Delia served as founding president of the school from 2004 to 2023. She brings extensive board experience and leadership to the initiation of the Sponsor Council.



**How do you hope your expertise and spirit will illumine your work on the Sponsor Council and support our leaders in ministry?**

**When I was invited** to Chair the newly-created Sponsor Council, I readily said "YES." I thought that the vision and practical creation of the Sponsor Council would be a means to use my experience, expertise, and spirit in a new way that would be helpful to the province and supportive of our sponsored ministries.

I am grateful for the many opportunities for spiritual growth and theological development, encouraged by the School Sisters of Notre Dame and for the company of Sisters who have inspired me throughout my life and those who are companions to this day.

As a teacher and educational administrator over the past 50+ years, my spiritual growth has been interwoven with my apostolic life. As a teacher working in several schools and universities, I experienced diversity in the students and communities I served and came to understand my important role in recognizing and developing the potential of the students I taught. As an administrator, I valued the responsibility and opportunities I had been given to create community, strive for excellence, be creative, create networks of support, and make decisions on every level, directly affecting the lives of those we served. In accepting responsibilities, I have grown in confidence, trust, and courage through the grace of God. (Cont'd)

## Sr. Delia, Continued

So far, the work of the Sponsor Council has been satisfying as the Council moves forward systematically creating relationships, defining procedures, and making decisions that will affect the sustainability of our sponsored ministries into the future. Together, we are beginning a new chapter in the inspiring stories of our sponsored ministries.



### Dr. Steven F. Cheeseman, Ed.D.

Dr. Cheeseman began his ministry in religious education in his parish and his teaching career at Mercy High School in Riverhead, NY. In 2002, he returned as principal to his alma mater, McGann-Mercy High school in Riverhead. After earning his doctorate in educational leadership and technology, he taught educational leadership, school law, and school improvement at several universities. Dr. Cheeseman served previously as Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut. He is currently serving as President /CEO for National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA).



### Mary Anne O'Donnell

A lay Associate with SSND, Ms. O'Donnell has held significant positions in higher education, including Notre Dame of Maryland University. For 28 years, she worked at Catholic Charities Baltimore where her most recent position was Assistant Director and Chief Administrative Officer, overseeing every aspect of the programs and operations of the agency. Since retiring, she has worked part time on special projects. She has served on and chaired several high school and nonprofit boards.



**As an elementary school teacher**, education was focused on imparting knowledge to students in a structured environment. Ensuring that sight words, reading comprehension and math and science concepts were learned was the main goal. I loved teaching second and fourth grades because the open minds, the wonder and excitement, the humorous interactions made me smile!

I moved into college administration and education became broader. Academics were complemented with programs and services that supported students holistically. Creating environments to support academic success and the growth of students as individuals seeking to develop their potential, learning to live their lives with purpose, finding causes or interests that they could commit to as ways to impact the world while finding personal satisfaction was exciting and stimulated my learning.

Working at Catholic Charities for the past 28 years where the mission: *Cherish the Divine within all, while helping people to fulfill their God-given potential* is about transformation. Serving individuals who live on the peripheries by listening, loving them and facilitating a process that allows their inner power to be realized is transformational for all of us mentoring staff, by providing experiences where skills are refined, (Cont'd)

## Mary Anne, Continued

new skills developed, exchange of thoughts and ideas are encouraged and debated creates an environment where each person is the educator.

When I accepted a position at an SSND sponsored educational institution, the mission of education for transformation of people resonated with my personal desires and goals. It did not take me long to realize that this was not solely the mission of this institution but of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. This definition of education shaped the rest of my career and personal life.



### Sister Carole Shinnick, SSND

A former secondary school teacher and clinical social worker, Sister Carole served as a Provincial Councilor for 8 years in Wilton, CT. After serving in initial formation, she was appointed Executive Director of the Leadership Conference for Women Religious (LCWR) and served for 6 years. Since 2008, she has been a consultant and facilitator, specializing in meetings, chapters of election and affairs, and team-building for leaders of religious communities of women.

## Educators in All We Do

**I am a product of 12 years of education** by the School Sisters of Notre Dame, as was my mother before me. Some of my teachers had been my mother's teachers, which had its own challenges. My music teacher never tested me for voice and said I was an alto because my mother had been. Years later I found out I was a soprano after trying to sing low for much of my non-illustrious music career.

After my first profession and with very little education in pedagogy, I was sent out to teach the seventh grade – all subjects included. I had a wonderful, patient teaching partner who mentored me in everything from SRA Reading Programs to tracking weekly milk money payments. I will be forever grateful for her mentoring.

After eleven years of teaching, and at a time when we were being encouraged to expand our experience of ministry, I left formal teaching and took a position as a caseworker at Catholic Charities in Newark. My supervisor there was a seasoned social worker whose career was spent at Catholic Charities. I was doing case studies for couples hoping to adopt what were unfortunately called “hard-to-place children.” Marcie, my supervisor, was wonderful - incredibly supportive and affirming. In fact, I soon realized that no principal had ever affirmed my efforts in twelve years as Marcie had in my first months as a case worker.

I never returned to teaching. I went to St. Louis University to earn a master's degree in social work. I have ministered in a wide series of wonderful settings where my experience as an educator enriched my practice of social work. In retrospect, I see that no matter my job title, I have been an educator in all I did.

Key among my mentors for whom I am eternally grateful was my first and only seventh grade teaching partner, Sister Joselle, and Marcie Meehan, my supervisor at Catholic Charities. They both taught me the value of patience, seeing potential in someone even when she does not see it in herself, and of the preciousness of expressed appreciation.

## Kathleen Sipes

Also a lay Associate with SSND, Ms. Sipes has been an enthusiastic Catholic educator for more than 5 decades and currently serves in the School of Education at Notre Dame of Maryland University. Her prior experience was in the Archdiocese of Baltimore as middle and high school teacher, high school principal, pre-K through 12 principal and then president. She has served on several boards and accreditation teams. Recently, she was on a team of educators with Beyond Borders to train teachers on La Gonav Island, Haiti.



“What helps you as an educator to make meaning in our evolving world?”

**I have been an educator for most of my life**, and there are two constants that have grounded my efforts: my love of children and my faith that the world can be better than it is. (I will admit that recent events in the news make me doubt the wisdom of clinging to the last constant!)

I believe that hope for the future always depends on the young. The world, clearly not what God intended it to be, has to be changed. Generally, this change is slow-- person-by-person. As we meet students in our classrooms, we can have an impact one student at a time. Encouraging each of our students to become all that God intended them to be is our task and is much more important than the content we present. If we, as educators, can see the talents, gifts and goodness of our students and enable them to see their own goodness, too, we move them to understand that making the world a better place is the task that each one of us has been given. At some point, I think that information turns into wisdom if we are asked the right questions and given the supportive environment, that each of us needs to thrive. It is up to educators to ask the questions and provide the support. If we do our job, I believe that there is the potential for a world that more closely resembles what God intended us to be!



## Gary Thrift, Ed.D.

Dr. Thrift found his calling as an educator in the Baltimore City Public Schools. For 33 years, he worked as a teacher, principal, area superintendent, and head of human resources. After his “first retirement,” he was invited to work at Notre Dame of Maryland University where he became a teacher again. For the next 13 years, Dr. Thrift rose from visiting assistant professor to full professor, then Dean of the School of Education. Now in his second retirement, he continues to look forward to new ways of service.

# Resources

## SSND Colored Schools in Maryland

[Video on Vimeo](#)

## Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation (JPIC)

### 5 Commitment Flyer Resource

JPIC in collaboration with the Office of Mission Formation, has made available a 1-page resource flyer of the 5 commitments of the Atlantic-Midwest Province of the School Sisters of Notre Dame for your use with faculty, students, staff and ministry boards: [Please select legal size format to print.](#)

## Laudato Si'

2025 marks the 10th anniversary of Laudato Si'. Please join the Laudato Si' movement in a year of adventure. [Click here for more information.](#)

## Pilgrims of Hope: Tools for the Synodal Journey

The Catholic Mobilizing Network is kicking off this Jubilee Year with a special webinar to provide tools that will help us answer this year's call to be "Pilgrims of Hope." [Click here to register for your Zoom link for the webinar to be held Jan. 16 at 2:00 PM ET.](#)

## Upcoming Ministry Formation Sessions

### Ministry Formation Program, (MFP)

#### Session II

March 7-8, 2025

Villa Assumpta, Baltimore

### Claiming the Fire Within Retreat

June 23-26, 2025

Malvern Retreat Center, Malvern, PA

### New Employee Orientation

April 8 or 10

8:30 AM-1:00 PM (Eastern)

Virtual/Zoom

### For Boards

#### BoardSource Article:

#### [AWARENESS TO ACTION:](#)

#### [A Guide for Boards and](#)

#### [Chief Executives on a](#)

#### [Racial Equity Journey.](#)

### Giving Leaders the Grace to Grow

#### by Ryann Fapohunda

How often do school leaders allow their staff, colleagues, and themselves to make mistakes and take time to learn how to perform their jobs effectively? Read here: [NAIS - Giving Leaders the Grace to Grow](#)



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