

School Sisters of Notre Dame

GOOD NEWS FROM AFRICA



Fall 2011

Celebrating a New Province!

This is a marvelous time in the history of our work in Africa. After many years of being “missions” of particular provinces of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in North America and Poland, and after a lot of work at writing policies and beginning our own formation programs to prepare young women to enter our congregation in Africa, we are finally uniting together to officially become **the Province of Africa** of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. In a religious congregation, a province is a part of the congregation recognized by the church. Each province of the larger congregation has its own leadership and specific policies which enable the sisters of that part of the congregation to minister and to live out their lives according to the charism of the foundress, but adapted to the culture and customs of that part of the world.

All of the provinces of our international congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame are then united under our general leadership which is located in Rome. The move to become a province is a sign of growth and recognition of the potential for leadership and new members.



Left to Right -- S. Victory Swansy-Essien, Councilor; S. Mary Kerber, Provincial; S. Grace Okon, Councilor

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Now in Africa we are ministering in five countries, have 75 sisters and 7 novices and live in 18 different communities. We have a house for postulants, our first step as young women enter the congregation, located in Kisumu, Kenya and will have 14 postulants this year. Our novitiate is located in Sunyani, Ghana.

We live in very culturally mixed communities as we have sisters from the United States, Canada, Poland, Germany, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and The Gambia. And we have all of you who have supported our beginnings and our growing on this wonderful continent. We certainly do hold you all in our hearts as we take this step of officially changing our status to that of province. We have here a little of our history in Africa as well as an explanation of our celebration.

You are held in our prayers in a special way on our days of celebration and we ask for your continued support in prayer and funding. Our development office will remain where it is in St. Louis and I look forward to hearing from you again!

Sister Ruth Emke, SSND
Director of Development

Good News from the United States

and our winners are...

Thank you to everyone who participated in our drawing this year.

We raised almost \$5,000 as seed money toward building our provincial house in Ghana. Our winners are:



Winner of the “Whirligig Whimsey” quilt
Jane Stock of Belleville, IL

Second prize winner of the baby layette set
Patricia Jones of Richmond, TX

Third prize winner of the hand crocheted afghan
Leona Kerber of Tempe, AZ



Birth of the Province of Africa *a future filled with hope*

By Sister Mary Ann Matachinskas, SSND and Sister Delia Calis, SSND

In the years after the Vatican Council II, the Church looked outward toward the world in its mission to evangelize. In 1972 the SSND General Chapter issued a call to all SSNDs to look toward the developing world and to carry the vision and charism of Mother Theresa, our foundress, to Africa. By the early 1970s Sisters were heading to Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Kenya.

In 1981 some Sisters from each of the five countries came together in Ghana for our first SSND African Assembly. They shared ideas, visions and experiences and began a focused process of SSND taking root in African soil. Other such gatherings saw Sisters prepare common plans for the formation of African SSNDs and other structures to facilitate our life and mission in Africa. In 1990 the Province of Poland sent Sisters to The Gambia and became part of the process of the development toward becoming a Province. At this same time African women joined us as postulants and novices.

The seed had been planted and was well nourished. In 2006, all the Sisters met together in Ghana as a

whole assembly and discerned to become a Province by 2011 so that the mission and life of SSND would move forward in Africa.

Then in April of 2011 the members of the District Assembly elected the new Council for the Province of Africa, 2011-2015: Sr. Mary Kerber as Provincial Leader; Sr. Grace Okon as Vicar and Councillor and Sr. Victoria Swanzy-Essien as Councillor. Sr. Mary whose country of origin is the United States has lived many years in Africa and served in leadership as District Leader since 2007. Sr. Mary is filled with a deep sense of gratitude and enthusiasm for carrying on God’s mission as SSND in Africa. Sr. Grace Okon comes originally from Nigeria. Her experience in both education and formation and her deep sense of joy brings energy to moving the new province forward. Sr. Victoria Swanzy-Essien from Ghana has a rich experience and background in the nursing field. She sees this new moment of being rooted in Africa both as exciting and humbling.

The Province of Africa has now become a reality. We rejoice and give thanks and we remem-

ber the wonderful works God has done and is doing in and through the many SSND’s, partners in ministry; bishops, priests and laity who have helped us in our community, life and mission throughout the years. The many years of scattering and planting seeds of SSND in Africa are breaking through, taking root and growing into sturdy, flowering plants throughout the continent of Africa: Kenya, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and The Gambia. We School Sisters of Notre Dame of The Province of Africa are deeply grateful to God, one another and the many who have journeyed with us in our growth in Africa. We trust in the faithfulness of our God as we move into a future filled with hope.



Sr. Cecilia Gros with symbol of unity

Behold I Make All Things New

By Sister Irene Brookman Arthur, SSND

On August 28, the feast day of St. Augustine, the School Sisters of Notre Dame celebrated with gratitude to God the inauguration of the Province of Africa and the installation of the first Provincial Council at the Divine Word Catholic Conference Center, Adoagyiri- Nsawam, Ghana.

The inauguration ceremony began with the gathering of the General Superior, two members of the General Council, Sister Carol Jean Dust and Sister Irene Ksiazak, members-elect of the new Provincial Council, the Provincial leaders from the Polish and the Atlantic Mid-West Provinces, former leaders of the District of Africa, Sisters who have lived and ministered in Africa, delegates from the African countries in which the School Sisters of Notre Dame are serving, Sisters currently serving in Ghana, SSND novices, friends of the Congregation and the Celebrant, Monsignor Hilary Senoo. The delegates came forth with soil from the countries that make up the new province and put it in a pot. Sr. Antoinette Nauman, the first District Leader, mixed the soil and formed a new soil to symbolize the coming together of the different countries. Through the 'traditional pouring of libation' she led the Sisters in calling upon the 'names of the ancestors on whose shoulders we stand' and invited them to join in the celebration.

The proclamation of the establishment of the Province of Africa of the School Sisters of Notre Dame was done by Sr. Mary Maher, the General Superior. She then asked about the readiness of the Sisters and to all her questions, the Sisters responded with great enthusiasm, "We are ready." All those present in the chapel responded to the proclamation with



Sr. Mary Kerber being seated on the traditional stool of authority

clapping, drumming, dancing and the shout "A-M-E-N". Then the song "God's Cause Is the Only Concern of Our Hearts" by David Haas was sung. Sr. Mary Maher then called forth the first Provincial Council members, Sr. Mary Kerber, Sr. Grace Okon, and Sr. Victoria Swanzy-Essien. With great joy the sisters and the members of the Provincial Council pledged mutual support, through the grace of God, and promised to be witnesses of love and unity in this divided world.

The seating of Sr. Mary Kerber as the Provincial Leader was

done by Sr. Sylvia Borgmeier and Sr. Margaret Malone, former District Councilors. They held her and sat her three times on a stool, traditionally symbolizing her being invested with leadership authority.

The African symbol of unity was presented to the new Provincial Council members by Sr. Cecilia Gros, reminding them to lead the Sisters to stay united in the divided world. The multiculturalism of Africa was portrayed during the prayers of the faithful as different languages were used and local songs from different countries and cultures were sung.

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The joy of the day was shared in many ways. The new Council told the story of The Province of Africa in a very creative way to remind the Sisters that a new chapter had begun and all members of the Province were to join hands in creating this chapter of the story. Time was taken to remember and to thank the Provincial Leaders who sent Sisters to Africa, the pioneering Sisters on the continent, the Sisters who have lived and worked in Africa, the former District Leaders, and our collaborators. The Sisters and the guests were also treated to a drama by the novices who brought to life our foundress, Mother Theresa of Jesus.

The celebration was crowned with Vespers which had been prepared to be prayed by all School Sisters of Notre Dame in solidarity with the Sisters of the newly inaugurated Province of Africa on this special day. A new chapter in the life of SSND Africa has begun and all the Sisters in this youngest Province of the School Sisters of Notre Dame are excited and enthusiastic about continuing the story.



SSNDs of the new province present for celebration wearing specially printed cloth, a tradition for special occasions

New Provincial Council with SSND guests