

TRUST & DARE

a publication for family, friends, and supporters of the School Sisters of Notre Dame



School Sisters of Notre Dame

Trust & Dare

Trust & Dare is a publication for family, friends, and supporters of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in the Atlantic-Midwest Province, Central Pacific Province, and Province of Africa.

Writer/Editor: Deb Litman
communications@ssnd.org

Photos of Stella Maris
by Andrea Cipriani Mecchi

Follow Us

facebook.com/ssnd.northamerica
instagram.com/schoolsistersnotredame
linkedin.com/company/school-sisters-of-notre-dame
youtube.com/sistersofnotredame

Learn more about the
School Sisters of Notre Dame at ssnd.org.

Contact Us

Atlantic-Midwest Province
6401 North Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21212
410-377-7774
communications@amssnd.org

Central Pacific Province
320 East Ripa Avenue
St. Louis, MO 63125
314-633-7012
communications@ssndcp.org

Province of Africa
School Sisters of Notre Dame
PMB Achimoto School Post Office
Accra, Ghana
ssndafrica2@gmail.com

or
Province of Africa Development Office
P.O. Box 80364
San Diego, CA 92138
619-504-8271
ssndsistersaf@gmail.com

Dear Friends,



This past March, the School Sisters of Notre Dame celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Vatican approval of *You Are Sent*, our constitution and general directory, which invites our entire congregation to follow the Gospel in the spirit of our foundress, Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger. Not a day goes by that I don't look to this document for inspiration and guidance.

So, when asked to write this reflection on making connections, the theme for this issue of *Trust & Dare*, I immediately thought of Paragraph 9 in *You Are Sent*: "...We are called and sent to deepen communion with God and among people wherever we are—in every place, in every time, in every situation..." In essence, SSND are called and sent to make connections!

In today's world where connections are made more often through social media or even a word puzzle in *The New York Times*, the SSND once again are counter-cultural, as we strive to make connections through personal contact and through prayer. In this issue, you will read about those connections with God's people of every age. You will read about the SSND Girls Hostel in The Gambia which, in its 35th year, continues to provide young girls with housing and a foundation for their faith, allowing them to make connections that will last a lifetime. Speaking of a lifetime, another story tells of our sisters in Timonium, Maryland, who continue to make connections with other residents and personnel in their skilled care facility through the loving leadership of Sister Rose Federici. A third story presents the work of Sister Bridget Waldorf, whose ministry as campus minister and vocation minister provides opportunities time and time again to make those personal and prayerful connections.

Our SSND connections are also strengthened by our relationships with our associates, with our ministry partners, and with YOU! The connections we have with people like you allow the mission of Christ to continue through our work as SSND.

In Pope Leo XIV's first speech in May 2025, he proclaimed, "God loves us...let us move forward, without fear, together, hand in hand with God and with one another!" Being hand in hand with God brings about connections! We continue to be grateful for your prayers and support, for it has often been said that prayer is the original wireless connection!

S. Nancy Gilchriest

Sister Nancy Gilchriest, *Provincial Leader*
Atlantic-Midwest Province, School Sisters of Notre Dame

On the Cover Sister Bridget Waldorf shares a quote from Mother Caroline Friess with a participant at the SEEK26 Conference in Fort Worth, Texas.



Sister Kathleen Marie Engers, who died this June at the age of 101, shown here in prayer.

MAKING connections

The theme of this year's *Trust and Dare*—making connections—is especially fitting for development, because connection is truly the foundation of all we do. Theologian Henri Nouwen wrote that fundraising is a form of ministry, though we seldom think of it from a spiritual perspective. As fundraisers for the School Sisters of Notre Dame, our role is to connect with you—our donors and friends—and invite you more deeply into the SSND mission and charism.

Our work is to educate, cultivate, and steward relationships that generate support from individuals, organizations, and foundations, ensuring that SSND's life-changing ministries continue for decades to come.

A sister's impact on a person's life does not end when a school or ministry closes its doors; it lives on in the hearts, values, and faith of the people who were formed there. Through your continued support, you carry the congregation's values, traditions, charism, and spirit into the world. Staying connected with you allows us to honor your experiences and affirm that you remain an essential and valued part of our community.

In the end, connection is not simply about remembering the past; it is about remaining faithful to a shared mission—one that continues to shape lives and transform the world, even as ministries change and new needs emerge. We invite you to reach out and connect!

If you would like to discuss your commitment to SSND, please contact your provincial development office.

SSND Development Offices

Atlantic-Midwest Province
Development Office
jshannon@amssnd.org
203-761-9732

Mary Kay Murray
Central Pacific Province
mmurray@ssndcp.org
262-787-1037

Sister Mary Dietz
Province of Africa
mdietz@ssndcp.org
619-504-8271

Sister Bridget Waldorf **SHARES THE SPIRIT OF SSND**

Sister Bridget Waldorf's smile is a welcome. Broad and reaching straight up to her eyes, it's a smile that says she not only is happy to see you, but eager to know you. Her openness and genuine delight in connection make her a perfect fit for her dual ministries as both a member of the SSND North American Vocation Team and head of mission integration and campus ministry at Cristo Rey Dallas College Prep.

In the ten years Sister Bridget has spent on the vocation team, she has had the privilege of sharing her experience as a School Sister of Notre Dame and accompanying others as they examine whether God is calling them to life as a vowed religious. Some

of her relationships with discerners begin through events hosted by dioceses, universities, schools, or parishes. Others happen through SSND-sponsored opportunities such as monthly evening prayer events and discernment weekends for seekers. Still other connections come through personal referrals or outreach; sisters, associates, and area vocation ministers regularly introduce the vocations team to young women who might be interested in the SSND community. As they convey the joy this life has brought them, Sister Bridget and her fellow vocation ministers also support women as they explore the questions, hopes, and fears that inevitably arise along any vocational journey. "We try to meet each person



Sister Bridget talks with visitors to the SSND booth at the SEEK26 conference where thousands of young Catholics gathered to deepen their faith.



Sister Maria Gomez and Sister Bridget Waldorf represent SSND at a vocation event at St. Ann parish in Coppell, Texas.

where they are," said Sister Bridget. "Some are just beginning to learn about consecrated life, while others have been praying, researching, and actively discerning for some time."

In addition to walking with women as they discern a call to religious life, Sister Bridget helps seekers get to know SSND by providing opportunities to visit and pray with sisters, participate in community gatherings, and learn about the congregation's distinctive charism—the specific gift given by the Holy Spirit to the SSND community to serve the world. "What makes the SSND charism so unique is that it started as a living reality in one person—Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger," said Sister Bridget. "She shared it with everyone around her, people were attracted to it, and for almost 200 years, that same gift has been shared across generations of religious and lay people. Sharing the powerful stories of how Blessed Theresa dedicated her entire life to striving for unity inspires discerners to see how they, too, are invited into that same call."

Making connections to the SSND charism is an important part of Sister Bridget's work at Cristo Rey,

as well. This past fall, Sister Bridget invited sisters from all over the SSND congregation to lead the school's morning prayer during the month of October. Every morning at 7:45am, the school community was led in prayer by an SSND or group of SSND on video from some part of the world. The sisters spoke in their own languages, greeting the students and choosing the focus for the prayer. "The school community was able to see the diverse sisters, hear their native tongue, read the translations of their prayers, and feel their care for our community," said Sister Bridget. "I think the impact of those consecutive days of prayer was meaningful. Students looked forward to prayer every day and they learned a lot about our congregation without me saying anything."

Last summer, SSND introduced a new opportunity by inviting students from their sponsored schools to serve at Camp Whole Kids, an SSND-affiliated summer program that serves low-income families in rural southeast Missouri. In that first year, four students from Cristo Rey took part. This summer, interest has more than quadrupled. The young people who participate work together with students from other SSND schools as well as sisters who minister alongside



them for the week. In working, eating, praying, and playing side-by-side, students get to know the SSND community in a deeper way. "I know one of the young women who joined us at Camp Whole Kids last summer is now considering religious life in a way that she hadn't prior to that trip," said Sister Bridget.

Opportunities like the one at Whole Kids not only provide a chance to grow in relationship to the mission and charism of SSND, they also help create an environment in which young people think about their life as a calling—whether that be to marriage, single life, religious life, or ordained ministry. Nurturing that culture of discernment is an important point of overlap in Sister Bridget's two ministries. "I think both vocations work and campus ministry are about accompanying young people and helping them to ask questions," said Sister Bridget. "'Who is God? Who am I in relationship to God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit? How do I want to respond to God's generous gift of life? Do I identify myself as a Christian and what does that mean in how I am present in the world?'"



"Today's youth are navigating a noisy, chaotic world, but I think their core desire remains unchanged: they long for authentic connection," said Sister Bridget. "They want to know God and experience God's personal care; they want to know they're not alone in this world. Our role is to help them quiet the external noise and create spaces where they can build a genuine relationship with Jesus. When young people experience this profound quiet, they realize that God's offer of life and light and authentic relationship is far more valuable than anything the world provides. Once they truly grasp that truth, it transforms their path and opens up the possibility of any vocation."



(Top) Volunteers enjoy a poolside moment with Sister Bridget at Camp Whole Kids.

(Middle) The Blessed Theresa of Jesus Rosary Society at Cristo Rey Dallas is named after the SSND foundress. "That's been a good and welcome connection to SSND," said Sister Bridget.

(Bottom) Volunteers from Cristo Rey Dallas visit Sancta Maria in Ripa after their week of service at Whole Kids Outreach.

SSND archives team HELPS WITH SEARCH FOR SISTERS

Since long before the internet made it easier to find your long-lost cousin or college professor after years of separation, archivists have been collecting, organizing, preserving, and sharing records that keep the history of individuals and institutions alive. More than just a collection of documents, the archives they manage act as bridges across time, connecting us with those on whose shoulders we stand.

It should come as little surprise, then, that the School Sisters of Notre Dame's North American Archives (NAA) receives hundreds of requests each year from people searching for information about sisters who have touched their lives. In 2025 alone, the NAA answered 455 "Search for a Sister" requests from relatives, friends, and former students. The inquiries are handled by an archives staff of three—Archives Director Michele Levandoski, Assistant Archivist Grace Ávila, and Processing Archivist Adrienne Rife—all of whom delight in helping people find the information they seek. "Many people think that archivists guard collections and keep them hidden, when the opposite is true," said Michele. "The staff at the NAA want people to learn about the sisters and we are always happy to help."

This past year, for example, a gentleman contacted the archives hoping to find contact information for his first-grade teacher, Sister Albertine Winkler. Although 55



Archives Director Michele Levandoski leads the team that cares for the SSND North American Archives.

years had passed since Sister Albertine taught him to read, the notion that he might send a belated thank-you note led this former student to reach out to the NAA. After finding the Search for a Sister feature on the SSND website, ssnd.org, he filled out the request form and quickly heard back from Grace. Unfortunately, it turned out that Sister Albertine had died in 1999 at the age of 88. But although it would be impossible to reconnect in person, the obituary Grace shared helped the inquirer learn a bit more about his first teacher.

"Assisting individuals in their search for teachers, relatives, and friends is so important and helps us build lasting connections with those inspired by the sisters," said

Grace. "It's wonderful to hear the stories and memories people share about the sisters."

In most instances, the people reaching out to the NAA know very little about the sisters they remember so fondly. They simply want to learn more about the women who had such profound influences on their lives. "I have heard stories of children who felt unseen at home and who, for the first time, felt valued because of a sister's kindness and attention," said Michele. "Others recall struggling in school until a sister took the time to help them succeed. Some speak of a sister who recognized a talent or passion and encouraged them to pursue a dream. Still others remember the homemaking sister

who always had cookies ready for visiting children—an act of simple hospitality whose significance should never be underestimated.”

Sometimes, the person reaching out never knew the sister personally but wishes to learn more because of a family connection. Not long ago, a relative in France requested information about family member Sister Mary Adeloga Schmidmeier, who came to the United States from her native Germany in 1936. In that case, Adrienne was able to find not only basic genealogical information about Sister Adeloga, but also a detailed autobiography that describes much about her early life, her call to religious life, her family, her immigration, and her ministries. The document brought the family’s relative to life in a way that names and dates alone could not have.

(Above) SSND’s North American Archives include over 2,000 linear feet of records dating back to the establishment of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in North America.

(Right) Assistant Archivist Grace Ávila handles the majority of Search for a Sister requests at the NAA.

This ability to transform the dry facts of history into engaging stories of human experience is part of what makes archives such a treasure trove. Connecting those stories with the people who care about them is what makes the collections truly come alive. “Archives are meant to be used,” said Michele. “Making these records available and helping people reconnect with the stories of those who shaped their lives is one of the most rewarding aspects of archival work.”



Tips to Search for a Sister

For research requests, visit ssnd.org/archives. Scroll to the bottom of the page and click “Visit the Research Page.” This page provides additional details on which records may be available for research. If you are looking for information about a specific sister, please click “Request Information from the Archives,” also at the bottom of the page. There, you can fill out and submit a reference request form.

Remember, including as much detail as possible helps us immensely. This includes using exact years when available and listing the name of the school or mission and city and state where you encountered the sister. Additional particulars, such as what subject a sister taught, how you knew her, or where you last saw her can be extremely helpful.

Sisters at Stella Maris

LIVE WITH JOY AND INTENTION

Living in community is central to life as a School Sister of Notre Dame. Much more than simply a sharing of space and resources, the commitment encompasses all it takes to exist as a community of one mind and one heart. Sisters are bound together by choice, pursuing a shared purpose, nurturing spiritual connection, and sustaining one another through all of life's joys and challenges.

On the halls of 2 South at Stella Maris in Timonium, Maryland, that dedication to community is unmistakable. There, sisters requiring long term care benefit from support that allows them to continue to live in devotion to one another and faithfulness to the congregation's charism. A dedicated team of people makes that happen—nurses, aides, and

support staff treat the sisters with expertise, love, and respect, and volunteers come frequently to spend time with the sisters. Additionally, Sister Rose Federici—who serves on the community leadership team for the residents of Stella Maris—focuses her ministry on the care and comfort of the sisters who reside there.

Sister Rose begins each day with a warm greeting for every resident, her boundless energy and positive attitude infusing the hallways with a sense of cheer. After sharing the day's calendar and any SSND news, she reads mail to those unable to do it themselves, spends one-on-one time with every resident, and makes sure each sister has what she needs. "Sister Rose would move mountains for the sisters under



Sister Rose Federici shares a laugh with Sister Kathleen Marie Engers. Such personal interactions are an everyday occurrence on 2 South at Stella Maris, where Sister Rose does whatever she can to ensure that every sister on the unit feels supported and cared for.



"The sisters at Stella have taught me to live in the present moment, always ready to see God in all things," said Sister Rose.

her care," said 2 South Unit Secretary Kathy Carlock. "She gives her all in every way possible. Whether she is taking sisters for appointments, helping with meals, engaging them in fun activities, or attending Mass or prayer services with them, she does it with kindness, a smile, and pure love."

Sometimes it's the little things that make a sister's day: a favorite piece of candy in the middle of the afternoon or a special party to celebrate a birthday or jubilee. Other times it is the delight of connecting with sisters in other parts of the world through Zoom or attending Mass with sisters and associates who come from nearby areas to join them on the unit's cleverly placed balcony overlooking the main chapel.

Thoughtful design elements like the chapel balcony are incorporated throughout Stella Maris, creating an intentional living space that contributes to the community atmosphere. Generous common areas contain a large table for meals, an informal conversation and TV-watching space, and cozier spots for reading or crafting. Plants and statues adorn the windowsills and bulletin boards on both sides of the room brighten the space and encourage the sharing of up-to-date information on SSND near and far. Porches overlooking the Loch Raven reservoir provide welcome outdoor area, and decorations for each season and holiday keep the space lively and dynamic.

Although Stella Maris is geared towards the sisters' needs, the sisters themselves continue to look outward, focused as always on ways to minister to others. 2 South resident Sister Paulette Doyas still works part time as an assistant in the Notre Dame of Maryland University registrar's office from a laptop within reach of her bed. She also spends a part of each day praying for the people whose names fill a notebook she updates regularly, her distinctive script filling every line and margin.

While not all the sisters on 2 South are able to keep up that kind of schedule, all remain deeply devoted to the ministry of prayer and presence. "These are powerful holy women of prayer who give all who



The sisters at Stella Maris are living proof that ministry is a lifelong commitment for the School Sisters of Notre Dame.



Sister Mary Elizabeth Orr catches up on the day's news.



Sister Carmel Rodgers and Sister Maria Felipe Lopez spend time in one of Stella Maris' common spaces.

come in contact with them a sense of hope," said Sister Rose. "Their spirit is life changing. Their quiet presence is contagious."

For Kathy, the impact of the sisters has been transformative. "The sisters have been a blessing to me from the first time I met them," she said. "I have learned caring, kindness, sharing, respect, love, a willingness to help, and most of all inner peace from them."

That experience is echoed by the many people who interact with the sisters and benefit from their faith, kindness, and attention. That includes students from

Notre Dame Prep (NDP), an SSND-sponsored school whose students pay regular visits to the sisters at Stella Maris. At Easter time, a group of middle level students came and made Easter bonnets with the sisters. As summer approached, a class of upper school students gathered with sisters on the porch to enjoy treats, blow bubbles, and toss beach balls. Some of the sisters who graduated from NDP shared stories about what the school was like in their day, while current students updated the sisters about life at the school today.

No matter what any particular day brings, the bonds among the sisters remain as a throughline of their lives at Stella Maris. "We pray together. We laugh together. We participate on-line in province activities. We become aware of world issues. As a sister is in the process of dying, we gather the other sisters in her bedroom to pray with and bless her," said Sister Rose.

Sister Paulette describes 2 South as "a close-knit, well-rounded unit of joy" and Nurse Manager Mary Jeanne Frank said she marvels at how so many personalities have come together to create a place where respect for one another is most important. "The SSND on 2 South are so supportive of each other and provide a strong bond of unity," said Mary Jeanne. "I have witnessed their devotion to each other, and it has humbled me."

SSND Girls Hostel **OPENS DOORS TO POSSIBILITY**

When she was 17 years old, Awa came to stay at SSND Girls Hostel in Bwiam, The Gambia, to study at Fatima Senior School. It was a big step for her, having come from a small, rural village more than four hours away. The new environment took some getting used to for Awa. She was quiet and a bit unsure of herself at first, often lingering at the periphery instead of joining in. The academic load, more demanding than she was accustomed to, sometimes left her doubting her abilities—especially in subjects like math and English.

It wasn't long, however, before Awa began to flourish under the support and guidance provided by the hostel. "The structured study schedule at the hostel helped her build discipline," said Sister Marie Mendy, manager of the hostel. "With supervised prep time and encouragement from the sisters and peers,

Awa began organizing her work and asking for help when she did not understand a lesson. Her peers supported her by forming small study groups where they worked together and explained difficult topics to one another."

Beyond academics, Awa was encouraged to participate in hostel activities. She joined the choir and later took on the role of assistant leader for the group. These experiences gradually strengthened her confidence. She learned to speak up, express her ideas, and take on greater responsibility.

By her final year, Awa had transformed remarkably. She became one of the top students in her class and a role model for younger girls in the hostel. When she left the hostel, she did so as a confident, disciplined, and self-assured young woman, ready to pursue higher education and take on leadership roles wherever her life might take her.

Awa's story, though unique to her, is not unusual. Since its establishment in 1991, SSND Girls Hostel has made it possible for more than 700 young women to undertake and succeed at a rigorous secondary education. Not only does the SSND-sponsored ministry provide students with a place to live in instances where a daily commute is not feasible, it also provides a safe, nurturing, and structured environment where girls are supported in their academic, personal, spiritual, and social development. "Students here can focus on their studies while learning important life values such as respect, cooperation, unity, and service to others," said Sister Marie.



During the Lenten season, the girls spent time praying with the cross every Thursday evening.

The girls' days are busy with daily Mass, school, structured study time, chores, evening prayer, and plenty of fun activities. Girls can participate in environmental clubs, choir, games and sports, and community service. They also bond through special occasion celebrations, retreats and reflection days, and the many moments of togetherness that come with communal living.

"Living in the hostel brings together girls from different families, communities, cultures, and faith traditions," said Sister Marie. "This diversity becomes a valuable learning experience that teaches them how to live peacefully and respectfully with others. The hostel experience also instills in them the values of learning respect for difference, practicing tolerance and open-mindedness, developing empathy, building friendships, and growing into responsible global citizens."

Sister Marie knows from personal experience the impact SSND Girls Hostel can have on the students who live there. She herself stayed at the hostel while she was a student, an opportunity she says shaped her life by supporting her personal growth, shaping her character, boosting her confidence, and cultivating her independence. "For me, living in an SSND hostel was more than simply staying away from home," said Sister Marie. "It was in the hostel that I came to appreciate the aspect of responsibility and learned to manage my time, organize my belongings, follow schedules, and meet expectations

without struggle. The clear rules and routines the hostel operates under shaped habits of punctuality, order, and accountability in my life."

Today's students find their experience much the same, enjoying the sense of community and belonging they find there and appreciating the safe and structured environment that allows them to focus on their studies and experience a range of activities. "We feel supported and cared for," said one student. "The hostel offers us opportunities to grow and experience life in meaningful, enriching ways that will prepare us for adult life and help us become confident, responsible, and independent."



(Above) Natural light floods the church at SSND Girls Hostel.

(Below) Life at the hostel fosters a strong sense of community among the girls who live there.





School Sisters of Notre Dame

sisters, associates, and ministry partners
IN PRAYER, MINISTRY, AND COMMUNITY

Sister Deb Sciano threw the ceremonial first pitch at the June 17 Milwaukee Brewers game.



Sister Terngu congratulates the recent graduates of Notre Dame School, Soma, The Gambia.



Sister Justine Nutz and Sister Anne Marie Gardiner share a lighthearted moment.



Sister Missy Gugerty hands the cup to Sister Mary Lennon during Communion at the installation of the new Provincial Council of the AM Province.



Sister Julie Lattner was among 14 million people who gathered to affirm their commitment to reconciliation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.



Sisters share messages promoting peace, justice, and care for creation outside Villa Assumpta in Baltimore.



Sister Dorothy Zeller plays a math game with a student at Good Counsel Learning Center, Mankato, Minnesota.



Sister Lucy Edidiong' works with pupils at St. Murumba Nursery and Primary School in Jos, Nigeria.



Sister Virginia Grumich celebrates Foundation Day with students of Notre Dame High School, St. Louis.



Sister Mary Alyce Lach reads to children at Trinity Woods, an intergenerational housing community in Milwaukee formed by a partnership between the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Mount Mary University, and Trinity Senior Services.

ASSOCIATES LIVE THE SSND CHARISM

Propelled by a desire to live the spirit of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, SSND associates are building bonds, sharing faith, and serving others wherever they are. Below are just a few examples.



Province of Africa

Drawn by the spirit of inclusivity and simplicity radiated by the sisters, Margaret Gichuki and Ferdinand Bett recently made commitments as SSND associates in Kenya's Nyabururu community. The two had been accompanied by Sister Sarah Kipsang during their period of discernment. Margaret and Ferdinand are pleased to have found a community with whom they can pray and eager to share their faith, hope, and love with the sisters and the wider community.



Atlantic-Midwest Province

Every third Thursday of the month, SSND sisters and associates in Baltimore work side by side with the staff of the Franciscan Center, a local nonprofit that provides its neighbors in need with a continuum of care. The SSND volunteer group plates and serves on the buffet line, makes sandwiches, and assembles lunches for Baltimore's homeless shelters. The monthly outreach is just one way that the group chooses to be present with people at the peripheries.



Central Pacific Province

After reading the book, *The Red Tent*, Pre-Associate Mary Ripper and Associate Cari Frink began a monthly Red Tent Gathering designed to foster deeper bonding with one another. The group eats together, prays, and shares their spiritual gifts. At their first meeting, each person tied red threads to their ankles or wrists, promising to pray for each other every time they noticed the red thread. They have been weaving their lives together more tightly ever since.

To learn more about becoming an SSND associate, visit ssnd.org/partner-us/associate/