



# NATIONAL SPONSORSHIP AND NETWORK OFFICE

## Network Notes

Happy month of May! For the schools in our network, May is a month of celebrations, especially with graduations, highlighting the transformative experience of our SND education. For all of us, it is a time to celebrate new life, evident in the many beautiful blooms of the season. Most importantly, it is also a special month dedicated to Our Lady Mary, who embodies the hope and promise of new life!



Mary exemplifies for each of us the grace and beauty that blossoms from saying 'yes' when God calls. Like Mary, the Sisters of Notre Dame have continued to say 'yes' to the needs and challenges of the times. Across the SND USA network, so many have said 'yes' to the sisters' invitation to partner with them in their mission to proclaim God's goodness and compassionate love for people of all faiths and cultures. In these many ministries, and the people they touch, we see the embodiment of hope and new life writ large.

We are all part of this great SND story told through the lives of so many who have said 'yes' to God's call to serve. For the last three months, I have visited many boards of our sponsored ministries across the four regions of SND USA. Over 200 dedicated individuals have answered the call to provide governance and leadership to the ministries they serve. With a resounding 'yes,' they have joined the Sisters of Notre Dame and all our lay leaders and partners in cultivating a world that brings the hope and promise of new life. We see the impact of their work in so many lives, especially in celebrations of our Catholic Schools and National Catholic Sisters Weeks. I hope you enjoy this sampling of those stories and others that are highlighted in our spring newsletter.

Gratefully in Notre Dame,

Laura Koehl, Ed.D.

## SND CHARISM EXPERIENCE



The 22nd Charism Experience was held at Bethany Retreat Center in March. Srs. Lisa Novak and Donna Paluf lead twenty-one members of the SND network through presentations, prayers and discussions surrounding the mission and charism of the Sisters of Notre Dame. The participants from six sponsored schools, one affiliated school and St. Claire HealthCare represented all four regions of SND USA.

Spring 2023

# CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE

## Congratulations to SND National Network Award Recipients



The SND National Network Awards program recognizes and celebrates the outstanding contributions of employees and volunteers in the SND Network for witness to the mission, vision and charism of the Sisters of Notre Dame. It is our pleasure to announce and congratulate the following recipients of this year's awards.

### Transformative Leadership Award

recognizes individuals who are catalysts for growth; inspire hearts; and transform lives of those with whom they minister.

- **Jim Deputy**, Principal, Clearwater Central Catholic High School, Clearwater, FL
- **David Gross**, Administrative Director for Education and Research and Director of Northeast Kentucky Area Health Education Center, St. Claire HealthCare, Morehead, KY
- **Jayden Julian**, Human Resources Coordinator, St. Charles Community, Covington, KY
- **Dick Williams**, Director of Finance and Human Resources, Notre Dame Academy Schools, Los Angeles, CA

### Gospel Witness Award

recognizes those who reflect and nurture the Notre Dame charism spirit and mission within their professional communities and among all they minister.

- **Sr. Mary Luann Bender**, Mission and Ministry Coordinator, St. Charles Community, Covington, KY
- **Sue May**, 4th/5th Grade Teacher-Minister, St. John's School, Delphos, OH
- **Kara Passow**, Director of Faith Formation, St. Mary School, Chardon, OH
- **Shellie Wilburn-Smith**, Behavioral Health Unit Program Director, St. Claire HealthCare, Morehead, KY

### Father Bernard Overberg "Teacher of Teachers" Award

recognizes educators that demonstrate exceptional, inspirational impact on the formation and professional learning of teachers.

- **Jenny Chirico**, Middle School Teacher, Lial Catholic School, Whitehouse, OH
- **Stan Hirsch**, Math Teacher, La Reina High School & Middle School, Thousands Oaks, CA
- **Trish Sanders**, Visual and Performing Arts Teacher, Notre Dame Academy, Toledo, OH

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Last fall, a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary at **Cardinal Gibbons High School** (Raleigh, NC) was placed in a lovely grotto that invites students, parents, and the community to spend time and pray with Our Lady. The statue of Mary is the first thing people see when entering the campus and tells the story of a Catholic school and how important the Catholic identity is to the community. It also honors those who have served at Cardinal Gibbons, including the Sisters of Notre Dame, who were part of the school for decades.

# LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a deep impact on our lives, these effects perhaps felt most profoundly by health care centers and schools. The SND network of schools and health care centers came together, met these challenges and continued to serve their constituents in the same mission-centered and loving manner the Sisters of Notre Dame have carried throughout history.

When states mandated shut downs in March 2020, schools quickly learned the importance of technology and navigating the virtual classroom. While grade schools, middle schools and high schools often had technology tools in place prior to school shutdowns, Notre Dame Urban Education Center (NDUEC) in Covington, KY saw the technology inequities in education. "Most of our students come from single-parent families in low-income areas who cannot afford internet services," said Sr. Maria Therese Schappert, NDUEC Executive Director. To combat this economic inequity, NDUEC allows students to use smart devices to complete homework and has prioritized keeping current with technological standards and expectations in the education sector.



Due to CDC guidelines for social distancing, NDUEC assigned each student to a specific table or desk when working with the volunteer tutors. This helped with sanitizing and keeping people safe. Because of this COVID protocol, NDUEC learned that the students liked having their own space where they could spread out. Now each student who attends Homework PLUS at NDUEC has his or her own table or desk for their tutoring sessions (pictured left).

COVID-19 forced schools to think differently, be creative, and learn how to adapt quickly. "Looking back, it was an incredible time of growth for our students, faculty, staff and families," said Amber Grayson, Associate Principal of Notre Dame Academy (NDA) in Park Hills, KY. Sheila Martinez, Principal of Our Lady of Victory School (OLV) in Washington, D.C. saw parents and teachers reaffirming their vocations. "Parents appreciated the challenges of teaching and educating their children," she said. "The benefit has been a renewed partnership with the teachers and school post-COVID," she continued.

Many SND schools opened with hybrid options in the Fall of 2020. According to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), more than 90% of Catholic schools opened safely, in person, five days a week with hybrid options during the pandemic. This is compared to approximately 56% of public schools. "We knew that virtual education was not in our students' best interest," said Jodi Johnson, Director of Academics and Teacher Development at Julie Billiart Schools (JBS) in Ohio. JBS instituted a combination of additional technology, mask-wearing, and cleaning procedures to safely welcome students back.

Administrators report that communication and transparency were critical during the pandemic. JBS set up a COVID response team and COVID page on their website, while Maria Early Learning Center (MELC) in Toledo, OH stayed in constant communication with their families. "We took what we knew and sent it to our families, said Lisa Nowak, President/Director of MELC. "Our families worked with us so everyone who needed a spot at the center had one," she said.

Schools learned that students need as much structure when working remotely as they do in the classroom. In the fall of 2020 students attending school remotely at NDA in Park Hills were asked to wear an NDA uniform or spirit wear shirt. "Students needed engagement, structure, and, at times, a bit of humor to get them through the day," said Amber.

# LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC

Pandemic lessons also included the value of strong leadership. "Leadership had to be strong and confident as well as empathetic and understanding," said Denise Teeples, Assistant Principal at Notre Dame Cathedral Latin School (NDCL) in Chardon, OH. "Having strong leadership gave students, teachers, and parents a sense that together we could do what was best for the students," she added. Lisa of MELC agrees. "We found a new depth of compassion and empathy," Lisa said, "and as a team were brought together on a more spiritual level."

Strong leadership and teams will continue to serve schools well as they deal with some negative effects of the pandemic. Schools report that the disruption to schooling during the pandemic has adversely affected the emotional and social development of students. Sheila of OLV is seeing more behavioral issues in early childhood students who have only been at home with no experience in any kind of group setting. "Students need more direct instruction in routines, behaviors, and social skills," she said. There are also more cases of anxiety and depression in schools. NDA in Park Hills has partnered with the Children's Home of Northern Kentucky to provide additional counseling services to their students who need it but may not have the resources available to them outside of school. "One of our biggest takeaways from the COVID pandemic is how important a stable, in-person learning environment is for the mental health and academic success of students," said Denise of NDCL.

Recruiting teachers is another post-pandemic challenge. According to Denise, the application pool for qualified teachers has drastically decreased since 2020. While some teachers resigned, others are seeking more flexibility in their job including working part-time, pursuing smaller class sizes, or avoiding a long commute. JBS has created and implemented a recruiting and retention plan and strategized around mitigating the impact of the teacher shortage.

Health care centers face challenges in continuing to keep residents and staff safe. St. Charles Community (SCC) in Covington, KY initiated daily team meetings to ensure an adequate inventory of protective clothing and supplies, set up on-campus vaccination clinics, and devised new and safe ways for residents to visit and communicate with their families and friends. Nichole Smith, President/CEO of SCC, remarked that dealing with the demands of COVID required a tremendous amount of time, energy and focus and affected everyone emotionally, spiritually and physically. Its challenges, however, did not deter St. Charles from celebrating its 60th anniversary (shown below), opening an inner-city Senior Resource Center, and moving several sisters from St. Joseph Heights to its campus.

Nichole of SCC agrees with school leaders that the pandemic proved how deeply mission-driven, dedicated, resilient, and cohesive the SND ministries are. "Living with the pandemic has deepened our humility, strengthened our faith in God and in one another, helped us to more clearly define our values, reset our priorities and identify even more closely with the Sisters of Notre Dame, who throughout their history have experienced the transformative power of the cross as reflected in their constitution," said Nichole.

***When we experience the mystery of the cross,  
we trust in God's love and goodness  
and respond with courage and sincerity.***



# CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK



**La Reina High School & Middle School** (Thousand Oaks, CA) recognized families with a Family Appreciation Day. The celebration included a father-daughter chili cook-off with a record number of teams participating that served up chili for the whole school to enjoy.

**Notre Dame Academy** (Park Hills, KY) kicked off the week with *Happy Nunday Monday* celebrating Mass with local SNDs. Following Mass, each sister received a rose and heartfelt gratitude for all they have done for the school over the past 117 years. Sisters joined students for lunch and were served ice cream sundaes.



Students and staff at **Lial Catholic School** (Whitehouse, OH) celebrated vocations and the responsibility we all have to listen for God's calling by returning to the beautiful chapel at the SND Center next door for Mass (left).

**Our Lady of Victory School** (Washington, D.C.) celebrated with a visit from special guest Kelly Branaman, Secretary and Superintendent of Catholic Schools (right).



**Clearwater Central Catholic High School** (Clearwater, FL) honored their school value of #LivingFaith with an all-school Mass with friends from Morning Star School in Pinellas Park, FL and Fr. Nate Wills, chaplain for the University of Notre Dame football team.

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# CATHOLIC SISTERS WEEK



During Catholic Sisters Week, students at **Notre Dame Academy** (Toledo, OH) reflected on the many blessings the Sisters of Notre Dame bring to their campus. The school celebrated the sisters' tireless efforts and sacrifices throughout history and the world and let them know they are appreciated this week and year-round.

Fifty-two weeks a year religious women stand with the poor, disenfranchised, and immigrants; teach children; fight injustice; heal the sick; share spirituality; empower women; defend the planet; promote peace; create community; and offer hope. **St. Claire HealthCare** (Morehead, KY) highlighted and honored these efforts with special thanks to SNDs currently ministering at St. Claire, including (clockwise from top left) Sr. Judine Lambert, VP of Mission and Director of Pastoral Care; Sr. Marla Monahan, Chair of the SCH Board of Directors; Sr. Janet Marie Smith, Dietetic Technician; and Sr. Marge Mouch, member of the SCH Board of Directors.



## Coming Up!

**6/18-23**

Rural HealthCare Student Experience  
St. Claire HealthCare  
Morehead, KY

**9/27-29**

National Ministry Corporation  
Board Retreat  
Covington, KY

**10/25-27**

Sponsored Ministry Leadership Gathering  
Lial Renewal Center  
Whitehouse, OH



**For more information about the NSNO, scan the QR code at right or visit <https://nsno.sndusa.org> or contact the staff at:**

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