

CROSS CURRENTS

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur • Ohio Province



SUMMER 2021
VOLUME 17
ISSUE 2



SISTER SARAH IN MODERN-DAY AMERICA
CONTINUING THE WORK OF ST. JULIE

CROSS CURRENTS

Summer 2021 | Vol. 17/Issue 2

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur change lives by making known God's goodness with you.

Throughout the world, we are committed to education. We take our stand with those living in poverty, especially women and children in the most abandoned places. Cross Currents is published two times a year for friends of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur by the Ohio Province Development Office.

We invite reader responses on the content of this publication or on the work of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. Comments may be submitted to Kevin Manley, Director of Development, at kmanley@ohsnd.org.

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Catholic Elementary School

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COVER:

**Sister Sarah Cieplinski attends
outdoor Mass at St. Columbkille
Parish in Los Angeles, CA.**



SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME DE NAMUR

IMPORTANT THEN, IMPORTANT NOW

Sister Mary Ann Zwijack has taught at Cincinnati's Corryville Catholic Elementary for 50 years. You'd expect her to tell you all that's changed, which she can. But she's also fast to tell you what hasn't—providing children with a sense of belonging, making them understand the value of every person, involving families.

That was true in 1971 Cincinnati, and it's equally true in 2021 Los Angeles. Ask 37-year-old Sister of Notre Dame de Namur Sarah Cieplinski. She works with children with special needs, who in addition face the challenge of unrelenting poverty. But no child can be forgotten, Sister Sarah says. No child can be left to the vagaries of chance or circumstance. It just can't happen.

It's a philosophy of Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur all over the world, and it doesn't change. It animated the first six Sisters arriving here in 1840, and it animates the Sisters today. When Sister Sarah entered formal religious formation, she joined 111 other women also in formation within the congregation—13 in the United States, 9 in Latin America, 2 in Asia and 88 in Africa. All determined to model God's love, and all determined to infuse that love within the hearts and minds of children.

It was important then, and it's
important now!

KEVIN MANLEY
Director of Development





Sister Sarah at
St. Columbkille in
Los Angeles, CA

SISTER SARAH IN MODERN-DAY AMERICA

They are eight and five years old sitting on a bench in the rear of a food truck lurching through the South Central Los Angeles streets, their mother at the wheel and a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur on a laptop—and this is their classroom.

They are two of the Sister's 19 students. The Sister is 37-year-old Sarah Cieplinski, a former Notre Dame Associate who in 2018 made her final vows as a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur.

“It’s modern-day America,” says Sister Sarah, “and I’m continuing the work of St. Julie.”

Sometimes, in this year of COVID, the work has been virtual. Sometimes, in-person. Sometimes the students are at home. Sometimes they have no home. (One student lived in a house that burned; before that she lived in car.)

The eight-year-old in the food truck, a girl with a learning disability, has been in school a few days since April. The boy, who has trouble with articulation, has been strictly virtual. For a while the mother left them at home with a babysitter. “But the babysitter would just shut them up in a room,” says Sister Sarah.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

So now they are in the food truck. And Sister Sarah, via Zoom, is there with them. She's even conducted an annual and formalized IEP (Individualized Education Plan) during a time when the mother could park by the road.



We're trying to work out the challenges, but it's difficult."

— SISTER SARAH

came into their lives to begin with. Sister Sarah is a special education teacher. She earned an undergraduate degree in Special Education from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, and a Master's Degree in Education from Mount Saint Mary's University in Los Angeles. Growing into adulthood, she had three callings: to teach, to journey with people experiencing disability, and to enter religious life. As a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur, she's answered yes to all three.

Uncontrollable Variables

On top of COVID, on top of poverty, and on top of special needs, most of Sister Sarah's students have yet another barrier: language. In the school

at large, 99 percent of students are Hispanic with many not understanding English.

"We're trying," says Sister Sarah, "the school, the teachers, the parents, the students. We're trying to work out the challenges, but it's difficult."

To help with English, each grade level has a Spanish-speaking teacher, but with in-person learning curtailed because of the pandemic, especially at its beginning, many teachers and students have had no choice but to improvise.

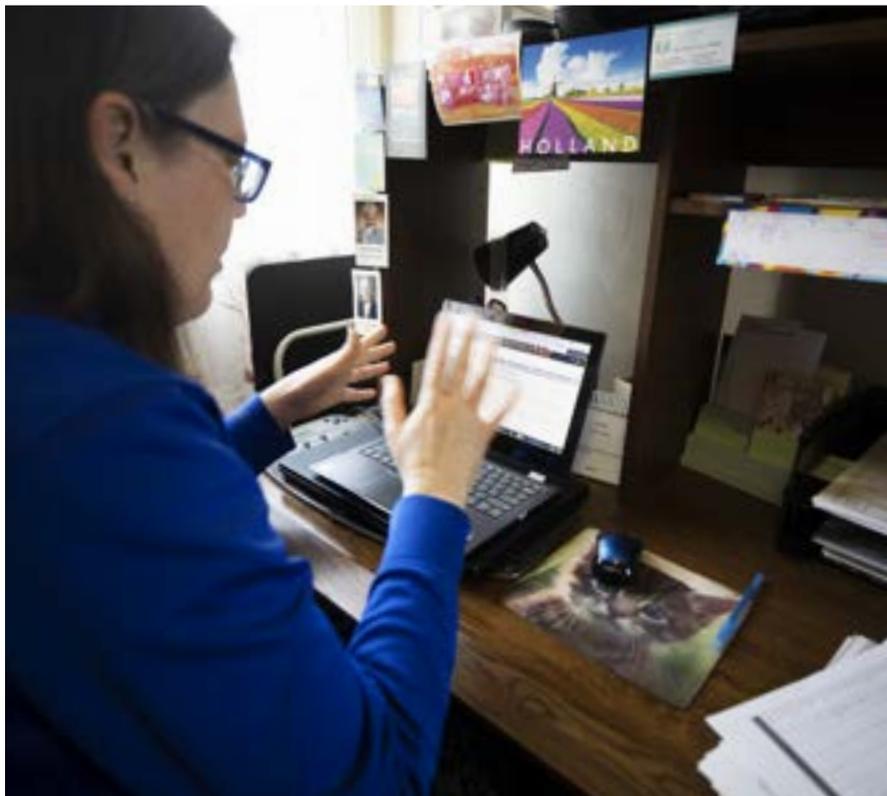
And, says Sister Sarah, "some kids can do things really well in person but then can't do them at all on a computer. And it's hard to help a child with writing on Zoom."

"Their lives are not easy at all," says Sister Sarah.

It's a story playing out in myriad ways across America, and only now beginning to ease. Two hundred thousand businesses shut. Ten million jobs gone or in limbo. Thousands of after-school programs—a lifeline for working parents—suspended for fear of the virus.

"Families need to make money to eat, to pay the rent," says Sister Sarah. "The mom [in the food truck] is really vested in her children's education, but there are just such barriers now."

Add to this the barriers of autism for some of the students, and physical and learning disabilities, which is why Sister Sarah



Due to the pandemic, Sister Sarah engages with most students virtually rather than in person.



Sister Sarah consults a wide variety of educational resource materials to provide a tailored approach for each child. For some students, working via a computer adds an additional layer of difficulty to their current educational challenges.

And this is where Sister Sarah reflects upon St. Julie.

“Being a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur is being open to the uncontrollable variables. And it’s seeing, like Saint Julie did, the goodness in each child, and seeing all of the needs of the child.

“Even when there are barriers that come along, I ask myself how can I teach these students to be confident in their abilities and in who they are. I can’t let them get defeated. Some are kind of giving up and they’re in second grade! And this can’t happen! I have to work to give them confidence in this world even if the world sees

“

Being a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur is being open to the uncontrollable variables. And it’s seeing, like Saint Julie did, the goodness in each child, and seeing all of the needs of the child.”

— SISTER SARAH



them in a certain way. Julie was bedridden for 22 years and couldn’t walk. Society’s view of her was that she was a cripple.”

Sister Sarah stops here, for emphasis, because of all that St. Julie went on to do.

Blenders and Vacuum Cleaners

“It’s a whole different way of working with a child, in person or over a computer. But I’ve learned to be ready for anything. Since April, every day my schedule has changed.”



Sister Sarah teaches at the South Central kindergarten through sixth-grade Global Education Academy, a charter school funded through the Los Angeles County school system. As opposed to teaching a special education class, she instead teaches children mainstreamed into regular classes but who still because of certain learning difficulties require extra attention. Almost all of the children in the school are low-

income and receive subsidized lunches. Most, also, are children of immigrants.

It's the kind of school Sister Sarah always wanted to work in, and it would not be so unfamiliar to St. Julie.

"It's a joy to me," says Sister Sarah. "It's great to be in a school that fits me, and needs me, and I'm a part of, and that sees the goodness in each child."

Even during the pandemic, she says, "I get to see how the students are growing through the year. And the kids have handled it very well, they have been flexible."

Sister Sarah recounts virtual learning classes when kitchen blenders are sounding in the background, and vacuum cleaners, and when other people are talking off-screen. Or when younger siblings wander into the computer camera's lens, sometimes literally crawling



Sisters Phyllis Cook, Gillian Wallace, Nancy Uhl and Sarah Cieplinski enjoy growing fresh vegetables for their community.



“

There's hope! It's wonderful! And the kids are such a joy. They're so happy, full of energy, a blessing to be with. They're so excited to see me, and I'm so excited to see them. It's wonderful!"

— SISTER SARAH

over the students. At times, too, those taking virtual classes are simultaneously tasked with caring for these younger brothers and sisters. And there is the inevitable bad Internet connection.

"I've seen it all," Sister Sarah says. "It's not the ideal learning situation to say the least. But the students really try to pay attention and to do their best."

Sister Sarah lives in community with five others at St. Columbkille

Parish two miles from the school, and most days walks to the school even as she provides virtual learning via Zoom. "Before I begin each day I think of all the struggles the students are living with. And I reflect on where God is in that, and try to act on it," she says. "What can I do, how I can respond to the need?"

But slowly, she says, things seem to be improving. While the school still works on a hybrid model of

education (virtual and in-person), more students are opting to return. There is an expectation the school will fully open in August.

"There's hope!" she says, "It's wonderful. And the kids are such a joy. They're so happy, full of energy, a blessing to be with. They're so excited to see me, and I'm so excited to see them. It's wonderful!" ■

NEWSBRIEFS

BY PROCLAMATION OF THE MAYOR...

Sister Mary Ann Zwijack has been at Corryville Catholic Elementary fifty years.

The milestone did not go unnoticed. By proclamation of Cincinnati Mayor John Cranley, February 2 was Sister Mary Ann Zwijack Day throughout the city.

Sister Mary Ann, arriving for yet another day in those fifty years, had no idea of a pending celebration—until she opened the school’s door and was greeted by colleagues, flowers, decorations, letters from former students and even a letter from her sixth-grade teacher!

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur arrived at Corryville in 1877, twelve years after the Civil War. They’ve never left. History has happened—wars, moon landings, and yes, pandemics—but the Sisters’ presence has never been interrupted.

Sister Mary Ann has been key to this presence. She’s taught math, science, health and religion. Over the last five years she’s helped with the school’s Choices for Children program, which works with seventh- and eighth-graders to set goals and action plans, and that involves professionals in the community who serve as mentors.

But it’s all based, says Sister Mary Ann, on priorities that haven’t changed in the 50 years she’s been at the school: providing the children with a sense of belonging, making



Corryville Catholic students help Sister Mary Ann Zwijack celebrate 50 years at the school.

them understand that each and every person has value, and involving families.

And there’s another priority now, always there but increasingly relevant—helping children to discern the truth.

“If I were in the classroom,” Sister Mary Ann says, “the most challenging part would be in helping the children navigate where truth lies, because there are many strange interpretations of what is real. We have to help them really search truth out. It has to be an important part of their learning.”

That’s true in social media, true in politics, and now—true in the face of COVID 19.

“But St. Julie would certainly expect us to carry on,” she says. “We have to put the future within these children’s reach. We have to make it happen, no matter what!” ■



BURRITOS FOR ELDERLY WHO ARE HOMELESS

Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Associates in Arizona teamed up with Sisters in the Phoenix Ministry Center this past March to celebrate National Catholic Sisters Week. But instead of throwing a party, Associates and Sisters brought beef, beans and tortillas, formed into an assembly line, and prepared burritos for elderly who are homeless living on the downtown streets of Phoenix. The process went so well that plans are already being made for a repeat effort next year. ■

Sister Nancy Wellmeier heats tortillas for the burrito assembly line.

CARING FOR GOD'S CREATURES



Sisters Dottie Deger and Florence Maier are in a very hands-on way answering the call of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and Pope Francis to care for creation—as Registered Wildlife Nest Makers. The two Sisters are crocheting nests for the rehabilitation of birds and small mammals as part of Wildlife Rescue Nests, a non-profit working with wildlife rescues around the world from Norway to New Zealand. If you would like to join in, visit wildliferescuenests.weebly.com.

NEW MISSIONS



Sister Carol Lichtenberg

The Ohio Province Leadership Team has announced that Carol Lichtenberg, former provincial, and Donna Wisowaty, former administrator of the Mount Notre Dame Health Center, have begun new missions. Sister Carol will now serve as a consultant and trainer for OneSource Center for Nonprofit Excellence, and Sister Donna will serve as a long-term care ombudsperson at ProSeniors. Both organizations are based in Cincinnati. ■

A FAREWELL TO SISTER JACINTA



Sisters Lois Ann Meyer (left) and Mary Ellen Carinato (right) shared their Montessori Matters educational materials with Sister Jacinta prior to her return to Nigeria.

Sister Jacinta Ojilimmobe, a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur of the Nigerian Province, returned to Nigeria in June after an extended stay at the Mount Notre Dame convent in Cincinnati. While here, and before and during the pandemic, Sister Jacinta obtained a Master's Degree in Educational Administration from Xavier University.

She also studied Montessori education, a philosophy of teaching and learning pioneered in Cincinnati by Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, in hopes of establishing more child-centered, practical and activity-oriented education in Nigeria. ■



Sister Donna Wisowaty

WE WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER



We are mindful that we stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us.

SISTER PATRICIA MURRAY SNDdeN

Formerly William Marie • April 10, 1926 – January 9, 2021

Sister Patricia taught elementary grades in Brooklyn, NY before teaching and serving as Principal for the next 21 years at high schools in Philadelphia and Washington DC. For the next 18 years, Sister Patricia served Our Lady of Monserrate Mission Chapel in a depressed area of Brooklyn, NY serving a largely Puerto Rican faith community as Pastoral Assistant and Director of Religious Education. Next, she coordinated an experimental community of active-retired Sisters at St. Rose of Lima in Brooklyn, MD for five and a half years while serving as the Maryland Province’s Director of Associates until 2007. For everyone who came to know Sister Patricia, she was a living expression of the Notre Dame charism.



SISTER SUSAN YOUST SNDdeN

September 22, 1941 – March 9, 2021

After graduating with her RN, Susan worked at Mt. Carmel Hospital in Grove City, OH for a year before moving to East St. Louis, IL where she worked at St. Mary Hospital. After returning to Columbus, Susan became actively involved in St. Agnes Parish, where she met the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and began to seriously discern a call to religious life. She entered with the Sisters in 1978 and took final vows in 1988. For the next 16 years, Sister Susan served as an operating room nurse at Good Samaritan Hospital in Cincinnati, OH. When standing for long periods became too difficult, Sister Susan became Assistant to the Director of Power Inspires Progress (PIP) based in the West End inner-city neighborhood of Cincinnati. She served at PIP until increasing health issues brought her to the Mt. Notre Dame Health Center community.



SISTER MARGARET O’CONNOR SNDdeN

Formerly Thomas Margaret • April 11, 1930 – February 15, 2021

Sister Margaret’s first foray into teaching was at Norfolk Catholic High School in 1957. The school was co-ed, with about 450 students, many from military families. There was a strong sense of community among the priests, women religious and lay people on the faculty, between faculty and students, and within the student body. In 1970, Sister Margaret was missioned to Philadelphia’s Archbishop Ryan High School for Girls. Five years later, she moved back to New York and began her 35-year teaching career at St. Francis Preparatory School in Queens, the largest independent Catholic School in the US and where her local community shared “prayer and outreach” with the surrounding faith community.



SISTER RITA BUDDEKE SNDdeN

October 7, 1916 – March 25, 2021

After receiving her M.A. in math/physics in 1938, Sister Rita taught alongside the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur at Trinity Preparatory School in Ilchester, MD. It was the perfect segue for her entrance into religious life with the Sisters in 1939. She taught science and math at both Trinity Prep and Notre Dame High School in Moylan, PA prior to earning her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology in 1960. Sister Rita’s credentials gave her a highly flexible base for her academic career: supervisor of secondary schools in the former Maryland Province; teacher at the undergraduate and graduate levels; educational consultant in the US and abroad; and higher-education administrator at The Catholic University of America, DeSales School of Theology and Strayer College, where she played a leading role in securing the institution’s Middle States Accreditation. In addition, Sister Rita co-authored two widely acclaimed biology textbooks.



SISTER MAURA PRENDERGAST SNDdeN

Formerly Formerly Maura Anthony • Jan. 23, 1934 – Feb. 25, 2021

After nearly ten years teaching elementary and secondary students in Philadelphia, Washington DC and Silver Springs, MD, Sister Maura received her doctorate degree and began her 41-year career teaching French at Trinity College. She gravitated to team-taught interdisciplinary courses with the whole range of liberal-arts disciplines. She also served as translator at the congregation’s General Chapters and other international meetings, forming friendships with, and learning from, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur from all five continents. Sister Maura cared for everyone, wherever she lived and worked.



SISTER ANN JULIE PETERS SNDdeN

October 19, 1926 – April 15, 2021

Sister Ann Julie ministered in various locations and settings. Her first mission was in her hometown of Brooklyn, NY and successive assignments took her to schools and parishes in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Atlanta and Rockville Center, NY. Over the years, she served in a variety of positions: teacher (at parochial, secondary and junior college levels); administrator (dean of students, academic dean, principal, department chair); campus minister; and director of religious education. Of the various ministries she undertook, her 23 years of teaching and campus ministry at St. Anthony High School in Rockville Center claimed a special place in her heart.



ONE OF LIFE'S PRECIOUS GIFTS

Gifts come in all shapes and sizes and gifts can come from the most unexpected places. We all love to receive gifts from friends and family. And we are all humbled that God blesses us with gifts daily and throughout our lives.

Over the past sixteen years, I have been blessed to witness the amazing women of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur as they work throughout the world to give children one of life's most precious gifts...the gift of education.

Our Sisters teach on five continents. Some of these schools are without roofs, as in Latin America. Some are burgeoning schools with developing curricula, as in Africa, and some, in Europe and Japan, are what we consider traditional K-12 schools. Sisters are also teaching in large urban and suburban schools in the United States.

The gift of education is faithfully being spread throughout the world and your support and prayers will allow the Sisters to continue doing God's work.

As you consider your own current and future plans, there are many ways to make a meaningful gift to the Sisters. One of the simplest is to make a gift in your estate plans in the same way you include your other loved ones. You can choose to leave a specific amount or percentage, or you could decide to leave what remains after your other beneficiaries have received their gifts.

If you have included the Sisters in your will or living trust, please consider letting us know so we can honor you and your gift in a special way. Notifying us not only gives us the opportunity to thank you, but also allows us to better plan how we continue our work of bringing hope to the lives of children, women and families who are poor here and around the world.

There are also opportunities to make meaningful gifts during your lifetime, allowing you to witness your generosity in action. Tax-free IRA gifts, called qualified charitable distributions (QCDs), have special appeal for our friends who are over age 70½. Generally, up to \$100,000 per year can be given in this manner. Even those who do not need to take minimum required distributions until age 72 (IRA owners turning 70½ in 2020 or later) may still make QCDs from their IRAs.

The gift of education is truly the gift that keeps on giving. I hope you will prayerfully consider how you can support the Sisters now and in the future.

If I can provide more information or additional ideas for giving, please contact me at 513-679-8106 or khadden@ohsnd.org.



KAREN HADDEN
Associate Director of Development





A WONDERFUL SUCCESS!

For a second year, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur have adapted to the challenges of the pandemic while sustaining support for their ministries here and abroad—when such support has never been more needed.

The virtual Partners in Action Event on May 13 reached people all over the world, and has so far raised nearly \$200,000 in gifts and pledges. Highlighted this year were the Sisters' *Live the Good Volunteer* program, the Clean Water for Life program and Sister Dorothy Stang's continuing ministry in Brazil. If you weren't able to view the Partners in Action event, you can still view it at:

<https://sistersofnotredamepia.swell.gives/>

ABOVE

Top Row Left to Right:

Sisters Mary Ellen Carinato, Ann Fanella and Colette Quinn

Middle Row Left to Right:

Sisters Carol Defiore, Rita Sturwold and Marie Kelly

Bottom Row Left to Right:

Sisters Mary Ann Zwiack, Lois Ann Meyer and Marilyn Kerber

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS



Monday, August 16 — Saturday, August 28

Live the Good Volunteers Brown Bag Lunch Drive
Cincinnati, OH • Drop off at the Mt. Notre Dame
Convent Campus

Thursday, October 7

Notre Dame High School - Chicago
50th Class Virtual Reunion
Celebrating the Classes of 69, 70 & 71
Virtual Event starting at 7:00 p.m. CT

Saturday, October 9

Live the Good Volunteers in collaboration
with Archdiocese of Cincinnati Day of Service
Cincinnati, OH • Tikkun Farm

Tuesday, November 2

All Souls' Virtual Reflection

Above:

Live the Good Volunteers
give a deep clean to Our
Lady of Tepeyac Elementary
School in Chicago, IL

VISIT OUR WEBSITE WWW.SNDOHIO.ORG FOR MORE DETAILS AND TO REGISTER