

Solidarity with Earth by S. M. Yvonne Nosal, SSND (LA)



It seems to me that when we speak of 'Solidarity with Earth', we need to be concerned about *right relationships*.

*"In the beginning,
God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)
"God looked at everything that had been made
and God found it very good." (Gen.1:31)*

We human beings are an integral part of God's creation. As such, it is important to form and sustain harmonious relationships, not only by living an integrated personal lifestyle but also by living in harmony with others, with our God, and with all of creation.

Our earth today suffers greatly from many forms of destruction, exploitation, and indiscriminant activities that contaminate its waters, obliterate its forests, alter climatic conditions, and eliminate human and other forms of life. This precarious world situation *"opens up huge questions about what it means to be human and about the future of our Earth home. It is important that each of us continues to grow in our awareness of and commitment to care for all creation and to be deeply conscious of the fact that the very future of the earth itself is at stake."* (NEW MOMENT Document, SSND General Council 2008)

If we work together in harmonious and right relationships, we can be assured of the fulfillment of God's promise to us for *"a future full of hope."* (Jeremiah 29:11) The question is: Are we ready and willing to do it? May the God who created the heavens and the earth and saw that they were very good be with each of us in our efforts to live harmoniously at all levels, especially in solidarity with our precious Earth.

SSND Delegates Contributed to CSW Meeting by S. Miriam Jansen, SSND (SL)

The [53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women](#) (CSW) met at UN headquarters in New York from March 2-13. This year's meeting addressed the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS.



The unequal distribution of responsibility and labor has devastating effects on girls, limiting their opportunities for education and training, threatening their health, and exacerbating poverty. Too many girls and young women are expected to balance excessive domestic labor with their educational responsibilities. As a result, many fail to realize their educational potential, and their hopes for a better future for themselves and their families become dreams deferred.

In preparation for the meeting, the School Sisters of Notre Dame joined 28 other NGOs in submitting a written statement to the CSW for consideration. The statement called on governments to strengthen policies aimed at protecting girls and ensuring their rights.

The SSND delegation to the CSW included students and faculty from the [College of Notre Dame of Maryland](#) as well as a young woman working at Sheil Catholic Center at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL. The young women on the delegation were particularly effective advocates for girls. Their work with the Caucus on Girls enabled the caucus to put suggestions for revisions to the Commission's outcome document into the hands of more than thirty government delegations and

helped to ensure that the final outcome document produced by the CSW treated girls' rights and concerns in a substantive manner.

Ideas supported by the SSND delegates that were incorporated into the Agreed Conclusions of the CSW included: the right of all girls to education and training; the prevention and elimination of child labor and economic exploitation; support for girls affected by HIV/AIDS, including young and adolescent mothers; the need to reduce the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS; acknowledgment of the critical role that gender-sensitive education plays in ending discriminatory attitudes against girls and women; and the requirement of zero tolerance for violence against girls and women.

The opportunity to learn more about the SSND charism was an integral part of the experience. A day-long orientation, coupled with daily reflection, journaling, and prayer, helped to remind SSND delegates of their unique responsibility to bring the Gospel and the values of the Congregation to bear on the deliberations of the Commission.

SSND delegates reported that the experience changed them in ways they did not expect. Working on issues beyond their own experience with people from around the world stretched them. Learning more about the charism of the Congregation motivated and empowered them.

Since their return, participants have had the opportunity to share their experience with a wide range of audiences and to incorporate their learning and insights into their studies and even into their life plans. Student Barbara Bailey wrote: "My UN experience was awesome and wholly in keeping with the goal of educating women to transform the world. I feel tremendously blessed and empowered to contribute to making world conditions better. My prayer is to have revealed to me how I will be able to carry out this goal."

Additional information, including interviews with SSND delegates, is available on the [SSND NAMA website](#).

Shalom "Summer Club" Event Held in Paraguay by S. Leetta Hammack, SSND (LA)



For more than 20 years, the School Sisters of Notre Dame in San Gerardo parish, Pedro Juan Caballero, Paraguay have held the "Summer Club" event for children and youth. The difference this year was the theme: "Shalom, A Way of Life" and a week of *Shalom* formation for leaders in the club.

To foster collaboration with other city groups, a committee was formed to plan the event. Committee members included representatives from departments of environment and women and children services, teachers from a local school, SSND associates and pre-associates, a parish youth coordinator, a seminarian, and a parent. Together they developed plans for educational and recreational activities around the theme.

Seventy-one adults and youth leaders received formation through audiovisual presentations, music, dance and art on such topics as peace and non-violence, leadership, the environment, and the global reality and responsibility. S. Roxanne Schares, SSND, International *Shalom* Coordinator attended the event, giving a presentation on the last day of the gathering.

From January 19 through 30, more than 300 excited children, ages 6 to 12, came each day. There were the usual sports activities and table games, music and dance, crafts and origami, and bible study. In addition, the children had opportunities to learn about Paraguay,



social situations, children's rights, recycling, and key values through stories. They planted trees and worked on a large wooden peace pole. The peace pole was the contribution of a local carpenter and symbolizes the dedication of the parish in pursuing efforts for peace.

Children returned home each day singing, dancing, and describing their experiences to family and friends. Youth and adult leaders at the parish and on the streets of the city wore green *Shalom* T-shirts that announced their commitment to be and make a difference through *Shalom* as a way of life for a better world.

Millions Participated in Education Action Week by S. Ann Scholz, SSND UN/NGO Director

An estimated 10 million people took part in the annual Education Action Week, April 20-26, to demand urgent action on behalf of the 774 million illiterate adults, the 75 million children out of primary school, and the 226 million youth not in secondary school—most are women and girls. Nearly all governments have promised “[Education for All](#)” by 2015, yet the current global financial crisis threatens to worsen the global situation and leave millions more without an education.

This year children, parents, and adult learners in more than 100 countries participated by reading from *The Big Read*, a book of short stories about education written by leading figures, Nobel Peace Prize winners, and award winning authors. Readers then added their names to a declaration demanding that all governments deliver a good quality education for all. “Learning to read and write changes lives; it means jobs, money, health, and dreams fulfilled,” commented Her Majesty Queen Rania of Jordan, Honorary Chair of Global Action Week, 2009.

[The Big Read](#) took place across the world in homes, schools, government buildings, and public events. One such place is the SSND Educational Center in Jamaica, New York, where adult women who did not have the opportunity to complete their secondary education are working hard to improve their literacy and numeracy skills and earn their graduation equivalency diplomas under the tutelage of School Sisters of Notre Dame.



The [Global Campaign for Education](#) (GCE), founded in 1999, brings together major non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in more than 120 countries. GCE promotes access to education as a basic human right. It also raises public awareness in order to create the political will for governments and other leaders in the international community to fulfil their promises to provide education for all.

The Campaign is demanding that national governments in poorer countries provide all people, whatever their age, with the opportunity to become literate and have access to lifelong learning and skills training. Richer governments and international institutions must guarantee predictable and long-term development aid to education that enables poorer countries to deliver the full Education for All agenda.

The Spirit of *Shalom* Alive in Hungary by S. Dominika Varga, SSND (MG)

Sisters of the Hungarian (Magyar) Province express the spirit of *Shalom* in their daily lives and have discovered new ways to serve those in need. Special *Shalom* days are commemorated in prayer and at the Eucharist by sisters and students. Through education and the care of students in the boarding schools, the sisters foster *Shalom* values in class and in exhibitions and competitions about justice, poverty and discrimination, global warming and Earth.

In November 2008, S. Ann Scholz, UN/NGO Director, and S. Roxanne Schares, *Shalom* Coordinator, visited the province and the four SSND schools in Hungary. They met with sisters, students, and teachers, giving presentations on global issues, the call to solidarity, and transformative education.

Students in the school in Szeged work in kitchens for the poor, serving and talking with guests. On special feasts, they visit homes for special needs children, and by inviting persons with disabilities to share stories of their lives, they gain greater solidarity with those in need.

In the Debrecen school ninth grade students have welcomed a new initiative, a social service class. After a month of study, they devote one day each week to helpful activities such as visiting homes for the elderly, caring for young children, playing and interacting with persons who have physical or mental disabilities, and tutoring younger children. Also in Debrecen the SSND Feminine Studies Program for college women is offering a new course on sustainable development. Through lectures, seminars, workshops, and publications, they consider the theme of “Woman and Nature.”

The school in Budapest began the TESZI club (Hungarian for doing) and short for TEvékeny SZeretet Iskolája (active charity school). The club is open to anyone willing to serve others in need through prayer, clothing donations, free private lessons, visiting sick children in hospitals, or helping at a soup-kitchen.

At the school in Makó, solidarity service involve helping the elderly, working in a kitchen for the homeless, assisting those with special family and student needs, and participating in a project related to ecological issues. The school leadership also organizes lectures for adults in the city on justice concerns such as the rights of indigenous peoples.

In Serbia, at the boarding school in Nagybecskerek, students regularly invite the elderly of the city to gather, play, visit, and celebrate special occasions. In Kikinda the sisters work in parishes, teach religion classes, and assist those in need of food and clothing.

Throughout the province SSND Associates participate in the sisters’ ministries, deepening the spirit of solidarity. Sisters and associates work together in Szovata, Romania (Transylvania) where they lead the choir; run a mobile music school; organize spiritual days, retreats, and cultural camps; and provide social service. With joy and gratitude School Sisters of Notre Dame, associates, colleagues, and students embrace the opportunity to serve others, open minds for knowledge, and create in hearts openness for solidarity with others in need.

Up-Coming Events

[World Environment Day](#), June 5, 2009, provides another opportunity for SSNDs to join in solidarity to examine the state of our environment, and to encourage responsible personal and communal choices and effective political action. This year’s theme is “Your Planet Needs You: Unite to End Climate Change.” Resources are available on www.gerhardinger.org

On June 13, 2009 we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the beatification of Blessed Antonina, Patroness of *Shalom*. With Blessed Antonina we listen to the cries of all creation and we respond in solidarity. Information about Blessed Antonina may be found on www.gerhardinger.org
