

Making Straight Our Path

As we enter the third week of Advent, Gaudete Sunday, we anticipate with great joy the birth of Christ in the world and in our hearts. Can you rejoice about something at this moment in your life and the world today? If so, what is it?

The [Gospel reading](#) for Gaudete Sunday recounts John the Baptist proclaiming to the priests and Levites, "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'make straight the way of the Lord,'" (John 1:23). It was there he introduced himself as the one who would prepare the path for Christ. The Gospel account takes me back to the story of Mother Caroline and the steamboat explosion.

She was aboard the Pennsylvania, down the Mississippi River en route to New Orleans, when there was a sudden explosion, destroying the majority of the boat's main structure. Recounts estimate 100 people blown into the river and 200 boarding a wooden flat to escape the wreckage. Mother Caroline survived the incident, but the trauma from the experience lingered. She mentioned that she was "battered in body and soul," suffering from night terrors as she heard the "groans of the wounded and shrieks of distress."

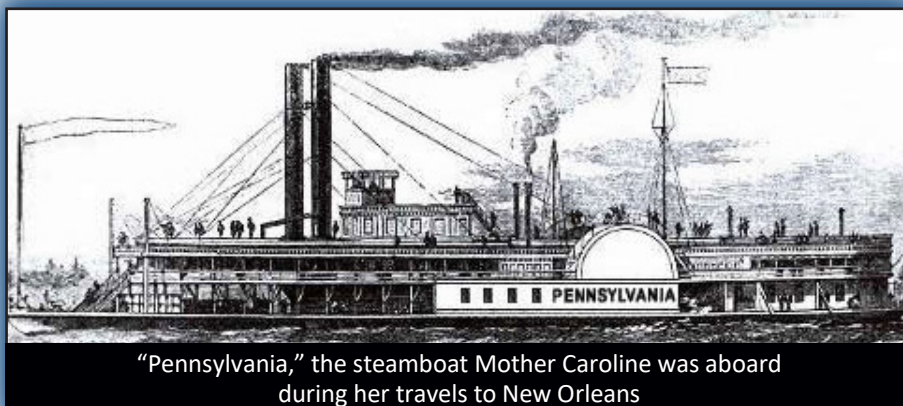
Despite this, Mother Caroline knew her duty to the congregation and overcame her fears, going on to establish



"When the Lord gives us a job to do, then we must have the courage to overcome all difficulties."
— Mother Caroline

over 200 missions in North America. When she became vicar of the SSNDs in North America, there were already 24 sisters, 17 candidates, 30 orphans and 1,250 students in her care. At the time of her death in 1892, she expanded the SSND presence to over 200 convents, 2,000 sisters and 70,000 students. Like John the Baptist, God worked through Mother Caroline to make straight a path for the congregation in North America.

In this issue of United in Mission, we read the remaining stories of mission leader-



"Pennsylvania," the steamboat Mother Caroline was aboard during her travels to New Orleans

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ship from our sponsored and co-sponsored ministries. As you read them, look at how God inspired the leaders to make straight a path for their

ministries. Ministry Services wishes you a blessed Advent and Christmas, as well as a happy and healthy New Year as we look to 2021!

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Mission Leaders Read the Signs of the Times

Sister Delia Dowling, SSSND, President Sisters Academy of Baltimore – Baltimore, MD

Sisters Academy of Baltimore (SAB) decided to hold its summer program for new students, “New Frontiers,” in person. We were equipped with masks, six-foot distancing, wipes, hand washing, up and down staircases, sanitizers, and temperature checks. At the end of the program, Alissandra wrote, “I would like to attend SAB because I know that this school can make me smarter. I have learned lots of important things in art class, reading class, and math class. I have made lots of new friends even though we are social distancing. This school is fun and cool. I really want to get into SAB.”



Sister Delia Dowling, SSSND with a graduating student

After meeting Alissandra and the other students who will become the Class of 2024, we knew we had made the best choice. Since the closure of school buildings in mid-March, educational leaders had to make daily decisions about what to do next. How can we continue to teach at a distance? Will we be able to resume our regular schedule in May? How shall we plan for our summer programs? What form will graduation take? Will we be able to resume in-person learning in September? For how long, O Lord? Our consideration of reopening was the most consequential and was grounded in the mission and vision of the school. We decided how to open after reviewing credible information about COVID-19, the impact of the school closure on students and their families, and the complexity of operating school buildings within the current environment. We carefully considered both the educational risks of not opening and the health risks of opening for our community of teachers and learners.

What form will graduation take? Will we be able to resume in-person learning in September? For how long, O Lord? What form will graduation take? Will we be able to resume in-person learning in September? For how long, O Lord?

Reflecting on the decision-making process, we recognized certain helpful discernment principles:

- Be prepared to adapt or change the decision as new information becomes available
- Keep centered on what is most important
- Consider all ramifications of the decision
- Develop scenarios
- Involve the community

On further reflection, Alissandra and her family used these principles as she chose SAB for middle school.

Mission Leaders Think Outside the Box

*Sister Evelyn Breslin, SSND,
Executive Director
Notre Dame Learning Center
– Rochester, NY*

Who would have thought that creating a hands-on project-based summer program two years ago for the Notre Dame Learning Center (NDLC) would be of great help during this pandemic? Well, it has been a blessing! NDLC officially closed on March 12, after the Rochester City School District announced its closing due to COVID-19. The center's laptops, iPads, games and other materials remained in the cubicles accumulating dust while tutors sat idly at home awaiting information and direction. Knowing we were sent to help our children and families, I knew we would have to think outside the box to respond to the needs of the time and continue the charism of Mother Theresa Gerhardinger. I scheduled meetings with our program directors, business administrator, tutors, and board of trustees to brainstorm some innovative ways

we could continue to reach our children. Together we came up with a summer enrichment program that was similar to the previous year's program except for one big difference: there would be no physical interactions with the children.

Our summer enrichment program took a very different approach this year as staff, tutors, and trustees created various fun, educational projects that were delivered to the children's homes. Children were provided with all the materials needed to complete nature-themed activities such as: painting rocks, making leaf prints, measuring rainfall, preparing recipes (ants on a log and worms in dirt), charting backyard animals, molding clay animals, and creating habitats. In addition, each box contained books, worksheets, and snacks! Our August 30 "Golfing for Good" tournament to benefit NDLC was cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions. Our active development committee of the NDLC board of trustees

**"When nothing is sure,
everything is possible!"**
— Margaret Drabble,
novelist

is already planning an August 2021 tournament. Until we can welcome the children and tutors back to the center we will continue to videoconference, phone, and e-mail with everybody! Tutoring will continue online and more projects can be delivered. One way or another, we will be ready to meet the needs of our children.



A child enjoying one of NDLC's educational projects

Mission Leaders Build Relationships that Last

*Lisa Steward-Baugh,
Executive Director
Sister House – Chicago, IL*

For thirty-eight years, Sister-House has served as a place

of hope and healing, with an emphasis on building a community among the residents and staff. The ladies of Sister-House help one another and

often build relationships that last a lifetime. Within the house, residents are a support to their sisters when challenging situations

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arise. These relationships have helped us deal with the disruption caused by the global pandemic.

Ladies who were working were laid off. The job training program ladies attended was closed. Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) groups stopped meeting in person. Social outings ceased to take place. There were no opportunities for community service. We turned to videoconferencing for everything from Morning Motivations to Inspirational Spiritual Project (ISP) sessions

to our Graduation Ceremony. One of our residents who had just started a new job was able to “work from home” at SisterHouse. By providing on-site mental health care, case management services, a

structured life skill program and additional supportive housing units, we have kept our clients safely housed, in treatment and working towards their goal of self-sufficiency.



Women of the SisterHouse community

Mission Leaders A Journey with Common Threads

On October 23-24th, Ministry Services offered its first-ever virtual ministry formation session. Fourteen participants tuned in from Illinois, Missouri, Maryland, New York, Connecticut and Canada. Participants ranged from executive directors, board chairs, department directors, and those with leading roles in development, communications, campus ministry, health care, ministry formation and behavioral health.

Read more about the weekend [here](#).



Screenshot of a Presentation by Sister Miriam Jansen, SSND on Mother Caroline Friess



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How have your experiences in 2020, in this time of pandemic, shaped you and your approach to ministry?
- What are your hopes and aspirations for you and the ministry you lead in the new year?

NEW RESOURCES FOR MINISTRY BOARDS AND FACULTY



UPCOMING EVENTS

Ministry Formation Session II
March 5-6, 2021
Villa Assumpta or Virtual

Proclaiming the Fire Within
June 22-24, 2021
Malvern, PA
*Pre-requisite, Claiming the Fire Within

Claiming the Fire Within
June 27-30, 2021
Malvern, PA



"All in Jesus' name! This most holy name is heavenly light to us who are blind. It disperses all fog of doubt and temptation, all darkness of spirit, and shows us the straight path to heaven."

- Blessed Theresa Gerhardinger (4523)

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