

# UNITED IN MISSION

ATLANTIC-MIDWEST PROVINCE

Transforming the world through education

December 2022

## Innovation as... "Incarnation of Love"

Yvonne DeBruin

**This issue of United in Mission highlights innovative initiatives and programs at SSND sponsored ministries in our province.**



The current Directional Statement of the 24th General Chapter *Love Gives Everything* states that as School Sisters of Notre Dame "we risk innovative responses as educators in a rapidly changing world impacted by globalization and technology." How our schools and outreach ministries take this impulse to heart and make this call their own, is inspiring to witness.

Following, four examples are featured: Academy of the Holy Angels' (AHA), first Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Danielle Holmes shares about her role and the impact her presence on campus has on building unity among the entire school community.

A second contribution is from Notre Dame Preparatory School (NDP). Faculty member Xiaoli Gong describes the Mandarin Chinese program, teaching Chinese language and culture.

She says, she wants to establish that being bi/multilingual is and should be a natural part of our daily life. This effort reflects the embodiment of the SSND charism by educating with a world vision, expanding our understanding of interculturality.

This is followed by Caroline Center's Moving Forward Nursing scholarship program. Program Director Jessica Robey describes an opportunity for Caroline Center graduates to continue with nursing studies leading to full licensure, thanks to visionary benefactors empowering graduates by contributing to their education.

Last but not least, we hear from Kristen Zorica, Director of Operation TEACH at Notre Dame of Maryland University (NDMU). A program established over 20 years ago, empowers highly skilled young educators committed to serve students

in Catholic schools, by calling forth and strengthening their professionalism, their understanding and commitment for community and to share spirituality.

Engaging the authors and contemplating their stories of innovation at their place of ministry, I think of them as lighted candles on our Advent wreath. There is so much darkness in our world, but they are lights shining bright. This year the candles on my Advent wreath have names: Danielle, Xiaoli, Jessica and Kristen, together with the ministries, visionary leaders, and donors who enable innovative responses to address urgent needs of our time.

Speaking of innovation: None of the featured stories could happen without God's Spirit and love being (Cont'd)

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operative in these individuals and organizations. Reflecting deeper, I venture to say, innovation leading to the wholesome transformation of people, structures and our world, is an embodiment, an incarnation of God's love. At Christmas we celebrate the incarnation of God's love becoming human in Jesus Christ. How innovative of our God, seeing the urgent needs of the time, and deciding to take on human form to dwell among us. Innovation that saves humanity!

*As we journey towards Christmas, what innovation is taking form within you to be incarnated for the transformation of people and the world?*

May God's love be incarnated through you this Christmas in innovative ways made visible throughout the New Year!

In Gratitude for your Ministry,  
Merry Christmas!



Yvonne DeBruin  
Director, Ministry Services

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### Danielle Holmes, Director, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Academy of the Holy Angels, (AHA) - Demarest, NJ



Danielle Holmes

Starting in early 2021, I was reintroduced to the AHA community. Still, this time instead of coming in as a nervous 9th-grade student, I stepped into the role as the inaugural Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). The time seems to have flown by since I was a student here. As I reflect on my work and time at the academy, I dove into some of the

critical components of my position. I wanted to take a look at my role and took the approach of partnering with various members of the community to get their insights, and experiences, and use their views to share in this article.

In describing this multifaceted position, the adjectives that arise are: Innovative, Strategic, Educative, Formative, and Transformative.

**Innovative**, as this is a new position, to reimagine the school community for our times.

**Strategic**, as collaborating with both community members and consultants to assess our needs with regards to DEI, looking at the whole picture to develop a path forward.

**Educative**, by working to invite speakers, provide training and skill-building tools to community members to develop an equity lens, and host intentional dialogue to address the skills needed (Cont'd)

## Danielle Holmes, AHA - Cont'd

for discussion of difficult topics while tying in the focus areas of the SSND.

**Formative**, through working with faculty, administration, and \*IDEAL council to lay foundational direction in some of our efforts and work for the middle state's self-study. The last descriptor for the role would be **Transformative**. Expanding minds to something new and providing the platform to change or develop is a key mechanism within my position. I work towards this by sharing knowledge of an equity filter as a skill to fit into our toolbox. This has allowed people to examine their work, to consider a wider context, and include others in the planning process to elevate the equity in their work. Both our admissions and communications teams have shared how it has been helpful in their work including marketing, building website content and revisiting common practices.



**An AHA community member states:** *"Danielle and her position as Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion has made the SSND mission of "unifying" an actual action here at Holy Angels rather than a word we read off a PowerPoint during a faculty meeting. The training in general has elevated us as a community of thoughtful leaders and educators. Although such work is ongoing, the progress has been considerable. On a personal level, I am proud that Holy Angels has a dedicated position to focus on such training. Our community recognized it had important work that needed to be done in the area of diversity and inclusion and we are doing it."*



The Academy is heavily driven by its mission. The very fabric of this role's creation was a response to the needs of the community which directly impacted the fulfillment of the mission. This role supports the efforts to welcome all students from different backgrounds, faiths, and traditions while celebrating those unique qualities. In turn, students will develop a lens to see the differences as gift and opportunity to connect which allows for common values, appreciation, and love of the unique

aspects of each individual. This influences building unity within the school and grows the hope that these future leaders will share and develop this foundation as they venture into the world and adulthood.

My work enables dialogue in many different ways, which are first steps toward goals and desired outcomes. Dialogue encourages marginalized people to speak up and others to openly listen and work to remove barriers and potential injustices. When I reflect on the SSND mission and connectedness to my role, I always come back to the 'Ministry Ideals' some of which include: inclusivity, systemic change, global perspective. These heavily fall within diversity, equity, and inclusion, providing the platform for AHA's understanding of DEI's integral role in advancing both, the AHA and SSND mission.

In conversation with our Director of Mission, Joan Connelly, I discussed the impact of the role as a whole and how having someone in this position sends a message to students. A student's experience is enhanced by someone making them feel comfortable through deep listening and gently affirming their dignity. My identity can have stand-alone impact by communicating that I am a supporter of all identities; this allows my presence to be received as an advocate/ally for all identities. She smiled and shared that this can be called the Ministry of Presence.

One area of challenge can be engaging people on the concept of 'oneness'. The idea that a person can be one with someone who is different from them, vs. similar, is new to many and nudges them outside their

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## Danielle Holmes, AHA - Cont'd

comfort zone. I find myself sometimes at a loss of words in these conversations when helping people making a connection to oneness. This affirms my conviction about the work of DEI as an urgent need of our time.

I am most proud of the dedicated effort members of the community are putting forth. It is not an easy and quick process but the future is what I look forward to the most.

A quote from Blessed Theresa sheds light on how I think about the work of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:

— “ —  
***‘All the works of God proceed slowly and in pain; but then, their roots are sturdier and their flowering the lovelier.’*** (2277)

— ” —  
*\*Inclusion, Diversity, Equity Access Leadership (IDEAL)*

## Xiaoli Gong, Faculty, Mandarin Chinese Program Notre Dame Preparatory School, (NDP) - Towson, MD

As one of the two faculty members for the Mandarin Chinese program at Notre Dame Preparatory School (NDP), I want to share my reflections on teaching the Chinese language and cultures with respect to bi/multilingualism and bi/multiculturalism at NDP.

Bi/multilingualism is the ability to use two or multiple languages while bi/multiculturalism refers to a sensitivity to, appreciation of, and value for diverse cultures in the US and the world.

Communicating in world languages with knowledge of and respect for the related cultures helps fulfill NDP’s mission of educating women to be globally oriented, regardless of what languages they choose to learn.

Our world language department acknowledges individual learning differences to help our students achieve bi/multilingualism. On day one, students take a multiple intelligence test to identify and reflect on their preferred way(s) of learning. This also serves as a self-reflection tool for me.

I prefer teaching language in chunks for beginners, who may be overwhelmed by grammar initially. However, some more analytic students immediately discern differences and similarities between Mandarin and English. Their questions clarify grammar points and encourage metalinguistic awareness—the ability to think about languages. I appreciate our students’ agency and position it as an asset to advance learning.

In addition to building on their strengths and agency, students benefit from developing a bi/multilingual identity as they learn Mandarin. They discover that our NDP families are already linguistically diverse; some of their parents speak Spanish, German, French, Japanese, Arabic, and Mandarin, while one grandparent is a Mandarin linguist.

I want to establish that being bi/multilingual is and should be a natural part of our daily life. Students have already used their newly



Xiaoli Gong

acquired language outside the classroom. A few 9th graders talked with a manicure staff in Chinese, and another student could “translate” a few sentences for her mom while watching a show on Netflix while one girl greeted her Chinese neighbors.

Building bi/multilingual identities also require positive attitudes

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## Xiaoli Gong, NDP - Cont'd

toward language learning. Students expressed a range of motivations for learning Chinese, including career goals. Their appreciation of Chinese also affirmed me as their instructor and the cultural openness of NDP and served as a counterpoint to anti-Asian attitudes of some Americans.

To facilitate our students' Mandarin skills, I contacted my former colleague, an English teacher in Chongqing, China, and arranged for her students/children to communicate with our students via Zoom. Our students could ask my colleague's son Sam and his friends about age, name, family, hobbies, and school life. Sam's English proficiency and his ability to speak a few other languages impressed our students and motivated them

as language learners. Our students also asked Sam about his experiences within Chinese culture and get to know his younger brother. These authentic communications brought Chinese culture closer to our students and nurtured their bi/multiculturalism while offering Sam and his peers linguistic and cross-cultural benefits.

Our students also experienced traditional Chinese culture through activities related to the Lunar New Year. With support from NDP administrators, the department chair, and the art/IT teachers, students learned traditional Chinese painting from a Chinese American artist via Zoom.

They also decorated Chinese classrooms with lanterns and red couplets and learned paper cutting from Ms. Guo, the other Chinese teacher. Following Chinese tradition, each student received a red envelope with chocolates. Students also displayed their painting in the world language hallway for the community to appreciate.

Languages can be bridges between countries and cultures. Looking forward, we will continue to build bridges by educating bi/multilingual and bi/multicultural students.

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## Jessica Robey, Marketing and Communications Manager

### Caroline Center - Baltimore, MD



*Volunteer Instructor Janice Bonner and Certified Nursing Assistant Students*

Inspired by the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND), for twenty-six years Caroline Center has served as a transformational space, providing an empowering education, and highly effective career skills training program for Baltimore City women. Today we continue in this rich tradition, with the SSND mission in mind, to create ongoing opportunities for the women of Baltimore. However, what we know for sure is that our mission and ministry would not be possible without the numerous benefactors, both small and large, who through their gifts have demonstrated a belief in our women and their future success.

This giving spirit was recently made evident through the anonymous \$45,000 donation establishing the "Moving Forward Nursing Scholarship," which assists Caroline Center graduates to attend a college-based nursing program leading to RN licensure. (Cont'd)

## Jessica Robey, Caroline Center - Cont'd

These donors recognize the clear potential of Caroline Center women to successfully advance their education. They also recognize the financial barriers preventing further study and career development.

"The Moving Forward Scholarship was started in response to so many gifted students who want to continue their nursing education. These women lack the financial means and sometimes support systems to continue their

education. This scholarship affords them the opportunity to move forward in the healthcare system."  
-Anonymous Donor

This scholarship aligns with Caroline Center's mission to educate unemployed and underemployed women in Baltimore for careers with potential for advancement - a holistic approach empowering each woman to reach the fullness of her potential, thus creating a future of hope for herself and her family.

We align with the SSND's belief that that the world can be changed through the transformation of persons especially women. Our hope is that we continue to nurture the vision while providing holistic education to the women of Baltimore.

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## Kristen Zorica, Director, Operation TEACH Notre Dame of MD University, (NDMU) - Baltimore, MD

Operation TEACH is an innovative post-graduate service program that seeks to develop a corp of highly committed educators to meet the needs of children in Baltimore area Catholic elementary and secondary schools. It was founded by Sr. Sharon Slear, SSND, in 2001 in conjunction with the Archdiocese of Baltimore to attract college graduates who represent a variety of undergraduate academic majors and come from a broad range of backgrounds and experiences. This program truly meets the educational mission of the SSND, "the world can be changed through the transformation of persons," as it transforms the graduates into highly skilled educators in Catholic education, and they in turn transform the lives of their students.

I was first called to be the Director of Operation TEACH by Sr. Sharon

Slear, SSND, within hours of retiring from my teaching position at St. John the Evangelist School in Severna Park, MD. Working with the young people who have committed to serve the students of our Catholic schools has been extremely rewarding for me as well. I have had the opportunity to share my own knowledge and experience with these teachers as well as learn so much from them. The teachers commit to three pillars: Professional, Community, and Spirituality, and I have grown as well as I guide these teachers in the three pillars of Operation TEACH.

### *Professional*

One innovation of the program is the acceptance of graduates with other academic majors.



*Kristen Zorica*

The new teachers follow a unique track to begin their teaching career. They spend their first summer in the program being given a multi-week course on topics that will help them

(Cont'd)

## Kristen Zorica, NDMU - Cont'd

begin teaching career as well as taking their first two classes in education. They are highly supported in their program by Operation TEACH staff, Notre Dame of Maryland faculty and staff, their school administrators, and their mentor teachers. My goal is to nurture in these teachers a love for and commitment to Catholic education, while providing them with the knowledge and skills they will need to be successful.

### Community

Another innovation is that our teachers live together in a community, and they often say that community living is the best part of the program. During their first summer, together we learn about one another and how to use that knowledge to live well within a community. They form strong bonds, share their experiences as new teachers, and provide support and encouragement for one another.

### Spirituality

Through community living, Operation TEACH teachers help one another explore, strengthen, and share their spirituality. Each Sunday they gather together formally to share a meal and to explore a topic of faith. They often attend mass together and share their faith in many other ways. Once each month I gather with the teachers to share spirituality with them. My own faith has grown as I see them speak about Our Lord, share insights into how prayer helps them in their lives, and apply what they learn about their own spirituality with their students.

Samantha Snider, a recent graduate of our program, wrote, "I chose Operation TEACH because I wanted to continue my education while also growing professionally..."

I attended Catholic schools in Baltimore from kindergarten through high school, so I was eager to give back to the community that formed me, while also learning in the environment that drew me to the vocation of teaching. Ultimately, I saw Operation TEACH as the opportunity to flourish as a teacher, a student, and a Christian."

This innovative program has graduated over 130 teachers in its 22 years, and we hope to continue to develop many more new teachers committed to serving in our Catholic Schools.

## Events 2023

MARCH 3-4  
Ministry Formation Session II  
Baltimore, MD

APRIL 18 and 20  
New Employee Orientation  
Virtual

JUNE 25-28  
Claiming the Fire Within Retreat  
Malvern, PA

## Resources

[In a Crisis, Great Leaders Prioritize Listening \(hbr.org\)](https://hbr.org) by Erika James and Lynn Wooten, Harvard Business Review article, September 2022

[The Letter: A Message for our Earth – A Laudato Si' Film \(1h22min\)](https://TheLetterFilm.org) [Click here to watch. visit https://TheLetterFilm.org](https://TheLetterFilm.org)

[The Center of Nonprofit Advancement](#)  
Access their Equity Lens Resource [here](#).

[Inclusion Counts](#) – Diversity.Dignity.Belonging.  
Access their Equity Filter Decision Making Tool [here](#).

## A Blessing...

The New Year can be likened to 'unchartered' territory, similar to a 'wilderness'. As we stand at the threshold of a new year, hearing the 'beckoning' of its call to trust and dare to enter, this blessing may encourage and comfort us:



### Beloved is Where We Begin

If you would enter  
into the wilderness,  
do not begin  
without a blessing.

Do not leave  
without hearing  
who you are:  
Beloved,  
named by the One  
who has traveled this  
path before you.

Do not go  
without letting it echo  
in your ears,  
and if you find  
it is hard  
to let it into your  
heart,  
do not despair.  
That is what  
this journey is for.

I cannot promise  
this blessing will free you  
from danger,  
from fear,  
from hunger  
or thirst,  
from the scorching  
of sun  
or the fall  
of the night.

But I can tell you  
that on this path  
there will be help.

I can tell you  
that on this way  
there will be rest.

I can tell you  
that you will know  
the strange graces  
that come to our aid  
only on a road  
such as this,

that fly to meet us  
bearing comfort  
and strength,  
that come alongside us  
for no other cause  
than to lean themselves  
toward our ear  
and with their  
curious insistence  
whisper our name:  
Beloved.  
Beloved.  
Beloved.

Jan Richardson,  
"Circle of Grace"

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