

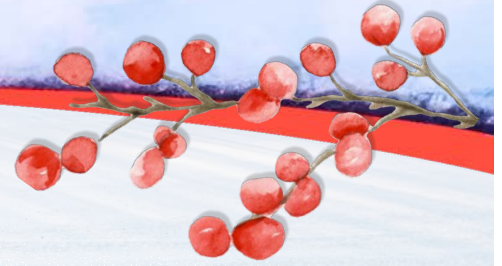
UNITED IN MISSION

ATLANTIC-MIDWEST PROVINCE

Transforming the world through education

Winter 2024

"... Exploring concrete avenues to eliminate root causes of injustice." *Call of the 25th General Chapter*



NDP, L-R: Meghan Doyle, Victor Pellechia, Nathan Jones, Maria Boote & Diana Degnan-LaFon

Our winter issue features leaders and staff from two SSND schools - Notre Dame Preparatory School (NDP) and Sisters Academy of Baltimore (SAB). They share their reflections on attending the annual [People of Color Conference \(PoCC\)](#) in St. Louis, MO - a conference of the [National Association of Independent Schools \(NAIS\)](#), "by and for people of color and inclusive of all"^[1] and is designed "for people of color as it relates to their roles in independent schools. Its programming should include offerings that support people of color as they pursue strategies for success and leadership. Its focus should be on providing a sanctuary and networking opportunity for people of color and allies in independent schools as we build and sustain inclusive school communities."^[2] More than 35 years after its founding, the annual NAIS People of Color Conference and Student

Diversity Leadership Conference bring together 8,000 independent school adults and students.^[3]

Mrs. Kalik Hunter Simms, President of Sisters Academy of Baltimore, made the trip a double win for her. Not only did she attend the conference, but she also visited an SSND co-sponsored sister school in St. Louis (Central Pacific Province), [Marian Middle School](#) and met with its president, Mary Elizabeth Grimes. Marian Middle School, like Sisters Academy of Baltimore, is part of the [Nativity Miguel coalition](#).

Notre Dame Preparatory School attendees left the conference with a wealth of learning and ideas. Mrs. Maria Boote, Middle Level Language Teacher, was inspired to strengthen NDP's Middle Level Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) club. Dr. Diana Degnan-LaFon, English Department Faculty, was encouraged to have uncomfortable conversations and received guidance in which to direct her own teaching. Ms. Meghan Doyle, (DEIB) Director, learned about (Cont'd)

[1] <https://www.nais.org/pocc/about/mission-and-history-of-pocc/#> accessed 1/15/20243

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

(Continued from page 1)

the practice of “code-switching”, a strategy people of color and other marginalized groups use to fit into the dominant culture, but is harmful in many ways. Mr. Nathan Jones, Senior HelpDesk Technician, gained insights into best practices he can apply with all students and was able to expand his professional and social networks with many of the conference participants. Dr. Victor Pellechia, Upper Level Principal, left with a deepened consciousness of how the conference’s goals correlate with the values of a Catholic School, Catholic Social Teaching and one of SSNDs expression of its charism (world vision) through the theme of global citizenship.

I am heartened by the increased motivation and desire for action as expressed through our featured conference attendees to help Dr. Martin Luther King’s dream of the ‘Beloved Community’ come true. But in addition, their learnings, growth and planned activities already engage many points in the new Call of the 25th General Chapter as you will see highlighted throughout the newsletter.

The last page offers resources to support your service in an SSND sponsored or co-sponsored ministry, including how a Baltimore delegation (hint: our very own Associate Dolores Moore!) visited Rome to urge the Vatican to expedite the causes of the first six African American Catholics on the path to sainthood. Please let me know of other resources you find helpful and would like to share with your colleagues in mission and ministry.

As I write these lines, snow is gently falling, inviting contemplation and stillness. May these winter months turn our gaze inward and deepen our unity with the Presence of Love dwelling within, readying us for birthing and sharing new life in the Spring.

With gratitude to contributors, readers and supporters for all we do together to live out the Gospel in the SSND spirit to transform the world. Many Blessings!



Yvonne DeBruin

Director, Ministry Services

**We co-create structures and practices that
challenge, free, and unite us.**

Call of the 25th General Chapter

Kaliq Hunter Simms - President, Sisters Academy of Baltimore (SAB)



It was a true privilege to attend the PoCC and be among the 125 heads/presidents of color who were honored on the main stage. It was exciting to see the growing number of heads of color from independent schools across the county! My attendance marked Sisters Academy's inaugural appearance at the conference.

One best practice I took with me came from a workshop I attended. One New York City independent school started an alumni board that worked in partnership with the school's board of trustees. It is a way for young professionals who are alums of the school to develop board-level leadership skills and to do professional networking. It also is an opportunity for the school to gain essential input and expertise from graduates. They also are intentional about using this vehicle to diversify their board of trustees. Select members of the alumni board join the board of trustees, as trustees' terms end. As many of the alumni board members are younger and represent underrepresented communities, this process becomes a "feeder" for greater diversity and equity in new board member selection.

Another key learning came from visiting a fellow Nativity Miguel School, [Marian Middle School](#). Since I happened to be in town for PoCC, I used this opportunity to learn about a "sister" school. I toured the lovely school and met with the president, Mary Elizabeth Grimes. I gained valuable insights in conversation with her. As president of nearly ten years, she has overseen exponential growth during her tenure--school renovations, endowment growth, reconfiguring of the grade levels post-pandemic, to name a few.

It is my hope that faculty and staff members of SAB can attend this conference in the future to network with peers and gain invaluable professional development experiences as I did this year.

We come before God willing to be changed, to accept our mission more intensely, and to respond to God's continuing call to mission.

Call of the 25th General Chapter



Kaliq and Mary Elizabeth Grimes

Mrs. Maria Boote
Middle Level Language Teacher
NDP - Towson, MD



The People of Color Conference is a powerful and essential gathering that provides a platform for teachers, administrators, students, and staff from diverse backgrounds to come together, share experiences, and address issues that are often overlooked or marginalized in independent schools across the country. It fosters a supportive environment for networking, learning, and amplifying voices that are integral to our societal fabric.

DEIB programs are incredibly important, especially in educational settings. I left the conference with wonderful ideas to enhance Notre Dame's Middle Level Diversity-Equity-Inclusion-Belonging (DEIB) Club. It is my hope to assemble a group of passionate individuals including teachers, administrators, students, and possibly parents, to collaborate on this initiative. I would like to set clear and measurable goals: what do we aim to achieve with this program? It is my intention to develop a curriculum to promote understanding, empathy, and awareness of DEIB topics. Community engagement will be essential, organizing meetings, or workshops involving students, parents, teachers. I would like to evaluate our progress by regularly assessing the program's effectiveness. Finally, it would be helpful to partner with other schools or organizations working on similar initiatives.

The creation of a more powerful DEIB program is an ongoing process that requires dedication, flexibility, and continual assessment. But the impact it can have on the lives of middle school girls is immeasurable. I am thankful for having been given the opportunity to attend the People of Color Conference and look forward to the implementation of enhancing our DEIB club in Notre Dame's Middle Level.

**We are educators in all that we are and do,
exploring concrete avenues
to eliminate root causes of injustice.**

Call of the 25th General Chapter

Dr. Diana Degnan-LaFon
English Department Faculty
NDP - Towson, MD



I had a fantastic, last-minute opportunity to attend the 2023 NAIS People of Color Conference in St. Louis. I had been very interested in attending for several years, and I was pleased to find out that the Conference really was as wonderful as my colleagues had claimed. After years of involvement in Notre Dame Preparatory School's DEIB efforts, I was very grateful to experience the positivity and welcoming atmosphere of the event. It was really exciting to be surrounded by creative, groundbreaking scholars!

Although the entire conference was wonderful, the highlight for me was attending Liza Talusan's presentation. Ms. Talusan's work encourages educators to build an identity-conscious education practice that focuses on curiosity, collaboration, critical thinking, compassion, and community. Her presentation was extremely informative and remarkably funny. The packed room was laughing almost the entire time. Ms. Talusan doesn't shy away from addressing uncomfortable truths. Her ability to confront complex and uncomfortable issues through candor, wit, and humor was inspirational. In listening to her presentation, I was struck with a realization. So many times, in working on our diversity and inclusion efforts, we may have unintentionally neglected students and adults who have an Asian background. I do actively try to see my blind spots, and I plan on being more intentional in both my instruction and my ancillary work.

I have been working my way through Talusan's book, *The Identity Conscious Educator: Building Habits and Skills for More Inclusive Schools*, and it is very useful in giving pragmatic guidelines and ideas for being more conscientious about identity issues. Uncomfortable subjects often lead us to avoiding important conversations. It is more important than ever to have these conversations and follow them with actions to build an inclusive, welcoming educational community. I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to learn and to realize in which direction I want to take my own teaching.

We are present with people at the peripheries and collaborate together to end all forms of discrimination, inequity, and violence.

Call of the 25th General Chapter

Ms. Meghan Doyle
Diversity-Equity-Inclusivity-Belonging (DEIB) Director
NDP - Towson, MD



The People of Color Conference (PoCC) was both empowering and challenging. Being surrounded by others who are passionate about diversity and justice was uplifting. I was able to network with others in my role at independent schools across the country, including other faith-based and Catholic schools. At the PoCC, I was inspired by the keynote speakers, conversations with my fellow colleagues and others I met, and by the workshop sessions I attended. One in particular stood out to me.

During the workshop, I was able to learn more deeply about the experience of employees (and students!) of color who “code-switch” on a regular basis. This challenged me to see from a perspective I have never had to and will never have to live.

The overall theme of the Conference was “Gateways to Freedom: A Confluence of Truth, Knowledge, Joy, & Power,” which ironically mirrors NDP’s theme of “Where a Gateway Opens” in our 150th Anniversary year. Part of this “gateway” theme reminds me of my role and responsibility to help others in the community to be more open, especially to those experiences that are different than our own. We all can learn so much from each other, and there is such richness in diversity and seeing from other perspectives.

As this is my first year at an SSND school, I also recently attended the SSND New Employee’s Orientation and was inspired by the charism of the School Sisters, particularly being community builders and risk takers, having a world vision, and responding to the needs of the times. I feel all of these are so pertinent to my role at Notre Dame Preparatory School as the Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging and what God is calling me to do. I am hoping to be a bridge builder: to help others understand different perspectives, encourage dialog and understanding, and build bridges between division within our community.



Nathan Jones
Senior HelpDesk Technician
NDP, Towson, MD



For me, the People of Color Conference (PoCC) experience was very enlightening because I was able to learn many things from other attendees of the same ethnicity regarding their normal work-life balance and how they carry themselves at their places of work. In addition, I gained a better understanding of the best practices I can use to help all students, and particularly students of color, here at Notre Dame Prep. Everyone at the conference was very welcoming, and I expanded my professional and social networks with many of the conference goers. I look forward to having an opportunity to attend this conference again in the future!

Dr. Victor Pellechia
Upper Level Principal
NDP - Towson, MD



It was a blessing to attend the recent People of Color Conference (PoCC). According to NAIS, “participants leave the conference better equipped to improve the interracial, interethnic, and intercultural climate in your school, which will have a positive impact on the academic, social-emotional, and workplace performance outcomes for students and adults alike.” The cohort of school faculty and staff members who attended have committed to meet regularly in the coming months to explore ways to put lessons learned into action.

I will continue to support these goals to celebrate culture and foster inclusivity in the community, particularly offering new opportunities for student leaders to engage in this work. In a Catholic school, these important conversations underscore and draw a discrete connection to the human dignity that binds all of us as “made in the image and likeness of God.” Faculty and staff from every level of school life shared about the triumphs and challenges of their efforts to build loving and inclusive communities. As an Upper Level Principal, I heard from and engaged in conversations with other Heads of Schools about ways to develop and cultivate a sense of belonging. For example, one school system in Hawaii developed online modules for professional development that explored the rich history and heritage of the school from its foundation to the present. Their goal was to ensure that this tradition was not lost as they continued to welcome in new generations of faculty and students. *(Cont'd)*

Dr. Victor Pellechia - Cont'd

The theme of global citizenship, central to the charism of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, was evident for all those present to take part in the experience. Representing various cultures and unique expressions of God's creation, this was a rich tapestry of men and women to celebrate, learn from, and forge connections for future visioning. It was this spirit of common brotherhood and sisterhood that permeated the few days we shared and that we could each take back to our respective communities with a renewed vigor to continue the work of lifting up cultural celebration, belonging, and inclusion.

Resources

In Case You Missed It:

[Baltimore group meets with Vatican](#) officials to urge canonization of U.S. Black Catholics. Find a follow-up article by Ralph Moore, [here](#).

[Pope Francis welcomes the School Sisters of Notre Dame](#) | [School Sisters of Notre Dame - Atlantic Midwest Province](#)

Doctrine of Discovery: Stolen Lands, Strong Hearts [Click here](#) to watch the film [1h 6min].

Board Resources:

Board Committee Membership: Who Should Serve on Which Committee?
[Click here](#) to access the article by BoardSource.

Effective Board Leadership is Like... [Click here](#) to access the article by BoardEffect.

Education:

Purpose - Reflecting on our Role as Educators.
[Click here](#) to access the article by the National Association of Independent Schools.

Upcoming Ministry Formation Sessions (MFP):

MFP March 1-2, 2024

Villa Assumpta, Baltimore

Sustaining the Fire Within Retreat:

June 25-27, 2024

Cranaleith Spiritual Center, Philadelphia
(prerequisite: *Claiming the Fire Within retreat*)

MFP October 18-19, 2024

Villa Assumpta, Baltimore

**The 25th General Chapter:
*Experiences and Impulses***

Winter 2024 Address of Provincial Leader, Sr. Charmaine Krohe, to AMSSND Ministry Boards.
Click [here](#) to watch the 10 minute video.

Shalom North-America Virtual Prayer Room

Every Friday from 10:00 am to 10:00 pm EST
we gather in this virtual space
to pray for peace.

Please join us!

[Enter the Prayer Room](#)

United in Mission is a quarterly publication of the Department of Ministry Services, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Atlantic-Midwest Province

UNITED IN MISSION

Yvonne DeBruin
Director of Ministry Services
(410) 377-7774 x 1153
ydebruin@amssnd.org

United in Mission

8