

### News from the Catholic Sisterhood addressing HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa.

#### FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear partners in Sisterhood,

My recent trip to Uganda showed me faith in action.

The positive feedback from Sisters who are enrolled in the new Transformative Education and Faith (TEF) degree program was overwhelming. One comment summed it up for me: "How life-changing this experience has been! TEF is giving us the opportunity to learn new concepts, live in community, and strengthen our own religious commitment. We are so grateful to Sister to Sister."

I was accompanied by our Program Director, Sr. Mayon Sylvain, RSM. Sr. Mayon and I met with the leaders of the Association of Religious in Uganda (ARU) who were attending their General Assembly and celebrating ARU's 50th anniversary. We shared many of the positive comments we had received from TEF students. In response, ARU's leadership invited TEF students to attend a special lecture on religious life by Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

At closing, two of our students were asked to address the Assembly! Standing before Cardinal Braz de Aviz and the entire Assembly, the Sisters described their TEF experience in moving words. In a celebratory closing ceremony, the Sisters presented the Cardinal with a copy of the TEF curriculum. This was a full-circle moment of joy for the Sisters—and for the many religious who will benefit from this program in the years to come.

As the ARU celebrated 50 years of service, Uganda Martyrs University (UMU) celebrated its Silver Jubilee. That's when we met with Vice Chancellor Father John Maviiri and other members of the administration. Father Maviiri said the presence of TEF on campus was a very positive development. Among the conversations we enjoyed the most were with Sister leaders at the Formation Center, and those working on the formation curriculum. Learning about their experiences first-hand is already helping us plan for the future.

While the days and evenings were full, I was thoroughly energized by it all. I saw our students blossoming in confidence and knowledge thanks to Sister to Sister-supported programs—and the assistance of our valued partners: the GHR Foundation and all the donors who make our mission work possible.

Over and again, the Sisters expressed their gratitude to you and everyone who has given them the tools and resources they needed to grow as women religious and to better serve people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. I am grateful, too. God bless you for caring.

In thanksgiving for Sisterhood,



Rosemary Jeffries, RSM | Executive Director

#### UPDATE FROM ZAMBIA

On rights, equity and gender-based violence | by Sister Mayon Sylvain, RSM

Sisters eagerly gathered in Livingstone, Zambia, May 26-27, 2018 at the Kalebalika Sparta Center to address the many complexities associated with the abuse of human rights. In particular, they discussed critical approaches to serving individuals who suffer from such abuse.



Sister Mayon  
Sylvain, RSM

The workshop was conducted in collaboration with the Kalundu International Study Center, which trains women religious from all over Africa. During the interactive presentation, the Sisters listened to specifics on human rights, women's rights, and the rights of children. On the subject of gender-based violence, the Sisters learned how these abuses undermine life, especially the psychological integrity of the person.

A presentation on the rights of children encouraged the Sisters to take immediate action by hosting workshops in various regions for mothers and girls. One workshop was held at St. Vincent De Paul Community School, Monze Diocese, September 21-22, 2018, attended by 79 mothers and daughters.

The presentation also provided important information on the basic rights of children: the right to food, shelter, education, life, survival, family, and the right to a name. The AAC:SS Zambia plans to host additional workshops on this topic later this year, and to increase the number of informed women, including women religious, to conduct outreach in the various regions of Zambia.

## REFLECTIONS FROM A FORMER AAC:SS COORDINATOR

A committee representing all 23 women religious congregations was set up back in 2013 to better understand the reality of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. From the onset, we recognized AAC:SS as an arm of the Conference of Major Religious Superiors. That gave us security and assurance of support.



*Sr. Bridget Gochera, PBVM*

The committee understood its mission: to offer holistic and practical support to fellow religious Sisters affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and to reduce the pandemic through ongoing education.

We believed that education will help break the silence and shame surrounding HIV/AIDS. One of our objectives was to develop HIV/AIDS programs for women religious. This we did. Among our initiatives was the design of a special AAC:SS cloth with the emblems of all the religious congregations. We also formed diocesan committees to manage the activities on diocesan level and facilitate dissemination of information. Each of the eight dioceses conducted a sensitization workshop, and the response was good.

Among the challenges we faced was the fear and secrecy surrounding the pandemic. Ignorance caused a lot of anxiety. We were accused of promoting promiscuity though our programs by fellow religious, both men and women. I must say that as a nation that is where we were. Gradually, the people are opening up.

We attended a regional conference in Lilongwe, Malawi in August of 2015. It was very informative and energy-giving. What strengthened me was that I felt the support of the Sisters in the sub-Sahara. We had ongoing workshops in order to keep abreast of the new trends. Among the workshop topics were sexuality, gender, poverty, and healthy living, including diet, just to name a few.

At every Annual General Meeting of the Conference of Religious Superiors we presented a report and engaged with its various recommendations.

I must say my involvement in AAC:SS opened my eyes to so many things regarding HIV/AIDS. The fear I used to have is no more. AAC:SS has united us as religious congregations. Sincere gratitude goes to our donors who are supporting us.

May Our Lord bless you.

*Sr. Bridget Gochera, PBVM is currently an AAC:SS committee member in Zimbabwe.*

## YOUR GIFT BUILDS SISTERHOOD

Your support for the work of All-Africa Conference: Sister to Sister will empower more women religious in the sub-Sahara to end the stigma and suffering associated with HIV/AIDS while building an international Sisterhood based on the compassion of Our Lord.

For details on giving and underwriting opportunities, please contact Sister Rosemary Jeffries, RSM.

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