



# In Mission

2019



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Much more ...



Becoming painfully aware...

*You Are Sent, Constitution 17*

# About Living the Gospel



Sister Roxanne Schares,  
General Superior

Committed to Christ’s mission, we are impelled into the heart of the world to address critical global concerns. On this journey, we often find ourselves at the peripheries, encountering those who are vulnerable and marginalized. In today’s world, migrants and refugees, displaced persons and victims of trafficking have become signs of exclusion.

To understand and respond well, it is vital to see the faces, hear the voices, walk with and share the pain of children and youth, women and men, fleeing unbearable conditions. Their journeys reveal their desperate desire to save their lives and create

a future. My ten-year ministry with those affected by violent conflict and war in Africa was challenge and grace. By becoming painfully aware of the suffering and daring to allow it to become my and our personal suffering, we discover what each of us can do about it (cf. *Laudato Si’*, 19).

This issue of *In Mission* highlights experiences of School Sisters of Notre Dame, reaching out and being with people forced to be on the move. The stories reflect ways of responding that welcome, protect, promote, and integrate our sisters and brothers into our lives and societies, that respect the dignity of all. Our sisters pray and accompany, educate and advocate, discern and take action that can transform us and our society.

Through these experiences, we learn that “it is not just about them, but about all of us” (Pope Francis, Message for the 105th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2019). It is not just about migrants and refugees; it is about encountering Christ in the other, about being compassion and love, healing and hope. It is about living the Gospel. ●

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### In Mission 2019

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[atlanticmidwest.org](http://atlanticmidwest.org)

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AF, AM, CP Collaborative site  
[ssnd.org](http://ssnd.org)

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Thank you!

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Cover photos: *Flight into Egypt*; Artist: Gentile da Fabriano, 1423. Source: Wikimedia Commons  
Top photo. Photographer: Trasmio; Source: Pixabay

# The migration reality and our *Shalom* network



By Sister Kathy Schmittgens,  
*International Shalom  
Coordinator, Rome, Italy*

From the beginning of my work in 2015 as the International *Shalom* Coordinator based at our Generalate in Rome, the phenomenon of human

migration has been one of the pressing concerns for our Church and our world. In response, our *Shalom* Network has consistently tried to learn as much as we can about the causes and find ways to act.

At our *Shalom* Seminar in 2015, we heard the personal witness of a family forced to migrate due to political retaliation. We also studied *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' Encyclical on care for our common home. In our study of the environment, we saw how the issues are interrelated. As places become more polluted or uninhabitable due to climate change, pressures to migrate increase.

Our Sisters find themselves at both ends of the migration reality. We live in countries where the situation is so dire that people are migrating away, and we live in countries that are the destination or pathway for those who are migrating. In both

situations, our *Shalom* network strives to be a countercultural voice in the din of negativity, fear and hate so present in today's world. ●

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*Shalom is the international network for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation for the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Each Sister is a member of the Shalom Network.*



Sister Kathy with other SSNDs and Novices at a peace march, St. Peter's Square, Rome.

*Photo: SSND congregation*



## Migration should be a choice, not a necessity



By Sister Beatriz Martínez-García, SSND, Director of SSND UN-NGO Office

In 2015, hundreds of thousands of families from Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, Eritrea, and other countries crossed the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe. All of them in search of safety and wellbeing.

On September 19, 2016, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the New York

Declaration for Refugees and Migrants pledging to develop a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. On December 10, 2018, a majority of UN Member States adopted the Global Compact for Migration (GCM); formal endorsement by the UN General Assembly followed on December 19. In addition, the UN Network on Migration was created to support collaboration among Member States in implementing the Compact.

Along with these efforts, the International Organization on Migration (IOM) is promoting diversity and inclusion of migrants in society through campaigns such as "i am a migrant", "Holding On", and "Global

*Continued on page 4 ...*



## ... Migration should be a choice

Migration Film Festival". The IOM Migration Data Portal provides statistics and reliable information about migration worldwide. Migration data is important for local, national and international policymaking.

I encourage you to watch the video: "Migration should be a choice, not a necessity" prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). It may help us understand why there are more than 258 million migrants throughout the world living outside of their country of birth. It may also call us to action and to dare to respond boldly in unsuspected ways (*You Are Sent*, Constitution 17; GD 36-38). ●

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### Links:

- <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/>
- Video: Migration should be a choice (FAO)

## SSND and the UN

Since 1994, the School Sisters of Notre Dame have participated in the work of the United Nations through our association with the UN Department of Public Information (DPI) and, since 1998, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) with which we have special consultative status. Our advocacy and educational efforts focus on the rights of girls, women, and those who are poor—especially their right to education, economic justice, and sustainable development.

## The painful wounds of war



Sister Martha Bertsch with a group of refugee boys. Photo: Sister Martha Bertsch, Austria

By Sister Marta Bertsch and Kurt Reel (ÖR-IT, Austria)

In 2015 thousands of refugees came to Austria. Eggenburg, a small town north of Vienna, received 45 unaccompanied minor refugees and Syrian families. The Mayor and the Pastor asked Christine and Michael Schneider-Heinz to coordinate the initiative "Welcome People". The couple had just returned from the SSND Shalom seminar in Rome, where they had participated as interpreters.

These teenagers were housed in a Caritas home. However, at the age of 18, they had to leave and

seek shelter elsewhere. They were practically left to their own devices.

Our SSND Sisters searched for private apartments for these 36 young people. Some of them were illiterate, so it was important to find schools willing to work with them.

Our sisters helped the boys and families with children to learn the language, accompanied them to various offices and to doctor appointments, and helped them if they needed school or personal help.

*Continued on page 6 ...*

# A commitment to immigrants and immigration reform



**Sister Leonora interviewing Manal, a Syrian refugee and widow who lives on the grounds of Villa Notre Dame(VND) in Wilton with her five children. Manal works in the kitchen at VND. Source: [Video interview](#).**

*By Caelie Haines (AM, Maryland, USA)*

Sisters and Associates in the Atlantic-Midwest Province, both in Canada and the United States, are committed to and engaged in work with immigrants and immigration reform. We have a committee that monitors developments with regard to immigrants and

immigration reform and keeps our SSND networks informed so that we can educate, advocate and act.

In the USA, we currently house refugees on our properties in Wilton, Connecticut and Baltimore, Maryland. In Canada, our Sisters in Waterdown, Ontario helped sponsor a family's immigration and are assisting them as they adapt to life in their new country.

In our immigration work, the issue we see most consistently connected to migration is poverty. Poorer countries have been stripped of their natural resources by rich and powerful nations, often with collusion by their country's leaders. The people who are sick or marginalized bear the burden of minimal resources. They must migrate if they are to attain a sustainable living for themselves and their families.

Our Sisters petition the government to send humanitarian aid and other necessary resources to countries in need. We also participate in the fight for compassionate immigration reform that keeps families together and welcomes refugees and the contributions they will make to society in return for a safe place to live, work, learn and grow. ●

## Fighting for the right to a safe and secure life



**Sister Rosa Maria speaks with community members.**  
*Photo: Mark Coplan, USA*

*By Sister Rosa Maria Trochez (ALC, Honduras)*

*Eight times a year, we reflect as a congregation on global issues in our Shalom International Solidarity Reflection using the learning paradigm: experience, reflection, action. In the [January 2019 issue](#), Sister Rosa Maria related her experience of the migration reality in Honduras.*

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I share with you the pain of experiencing the massive exodus of thousands of Hondurans. They are fleeing the unbearable conditions of life in our country. We have seen children, women, young people, men, in short, whole families, desperately wanting to save their lives.

The alarming reasons for the displacement of our

*Continued on page 7 ...*

# Unaccompanied, underage refugees: A challenge for us



Sister M. Diethild working with Oumar, a refugee who graduated from the Brede Vocational College and went on to study business administration. Photo: Verena Biermann, Brakel, Germany

By Sister M. Diethild Wicker (BY, Germany)

Our directional statement “Love gives everything” is a challenge and a commitment for each School Sister of Notre Dame, including myself in my work with underage refugees.

In 2013, after a dramatic escape, the first refugees from Guinea came to us at the Kolping-Berufsbildungswerk (Kolping Vocational Training Center) in Brakel, Germany, where I have been teaching for 10 years.

In 2015, twenty-one young refugees arrived here; I have accompanied them intensively since the beginning. My job has many facets: I go with them to doctors, psychologists, offices, and authorities and we have many talks. Above all, the boys need to regain their self-esteem and confidence in their own abilities.

Every young person has their own horrendous escape story. For example, Fikadu, from Eritrea, was

being forced to become a soldier at 14. He fled to Sudan, then through the desert to Libya, waited for months for money from his parents to pay smugglers, and then spent 14 days in a rubber boat crossing the Mediterranean to Italy. “I always had to stay awake, otherwise I would have been thrown into the sea,” said Fikadu, his hands shaking at the memory.

Finally land and the cry: “Hungry, hungry!” Italy, Austria, Germany, Hamburg, Dortmund, Höxter, Brakel. Completely exhausted, frightened, crying, traumatized, Fikadu arrived here and collapsed.

Today he is doing well and has contact with his parents and siblings. He works in gardening and landscaping for a large company and is appreciated there.

“Love gives everything.” Every effort is worthwhile and corresponds in our apostolate to meeting people with respect and empathy regardless of their religion and background. ●

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the Province of Austria-Italy. Especially helpful were Sisters Elise Silvestri, Jean Greenwald, Helen Plum, and Martha Bertsch who is currently working in this field. These SSND Sisters have been, and remain a strong testimony of lived neighborly charity to these displaced people. ●

## ... The painful wounds of war

The war has left painful wounds. Help, a sign of affection, an open ear, a word of appreciation can all help to heal these wounds.

This project was supported from the beginning by

# Being Nigerian in Hungary

By Sister Kinga Baráti (MG, Hungary)

Favour, 11, is in the fifth grade. She arrived at our school in Makó, Hungary a few months ago. Her arrival sparked lively interest among the students, because she was the first among us whose parents are from Africa. Despite being born in Hungary, her status is stateless. Her parents arrived 14 years ago from Nigeria. I visited her family to interview her, her father, Henry and her Hungarian stepmother, Vivien.

**Favour:** People say I am like an average Hungarian teenager. Those who do not know me usually talk to me in English; they are very surprised when they find out that I speak Hungarian excellently.

I would like to become a doctor, specifically, a plastic surgeon.

In my new school, I like that we treat each other as if we were the same. We are the same in fact; people do not judge you by the color of your skin. In another school, when I got a bad grade once, they connected it with the color of my skin.

**Vivien:** I often experience prejudice. Children are not taught that calling someone a Negro (néger) is a hurtful expression for them. When my little boy was three years old, he wanted to be white and he kept scratching his skin not to be brown. I taught him to be proud of what he is.

**Henry:** People in other countries do not know what is happening here. On the streets, I am provoked; they spit on me and say: "What are you doing here? Go home to Africa!"

I have had positive experiences, too, of course. An old man came to me at a shop and kindly greeted



Favour (left) with a classmate at their school in Makó, Hungary.

Photo: Sister M. Kinga Baráti, Makó, Hungary

me: "You are one of those Negros, like that famous boxer."

People and politicians should be told: whoever comes here and is willing to fit into this culture, should not be hurt, beaten or criticized. They should get to know them first, and then judge. ●



## ... Fighting for the right to a safe and secure life

peoples include war, violence, extreme economic inequality, corruption, impunity, and lack of opportunities for employment, health, education, and housing. Either they fear for their future or they just do not see a future.

I am a Human Rights Promoter and I work to support the community of San Isidro in El Progreso, Yoro, Honduras. This community has been prosecuted for occupying lands on which they have been living for a long time. We fight for their rights so that they and others searching for a safe and secure life do not have to leave Honduras. ●

# Serving refugees with humility, love, and compassion

By Trudy Hamilton (CP, Missouri, USA)

Sisters from across the Central Pacific Province have been responding to the urgent needs of immigrants and refugees for many years, but there has been an increased sense of urgency over the last year, especially along the southern border of the United States. Working in collaboration with other congregations, Sisters are supporting immigrants and asylum seekers in El Paso, Texas, by serving meals, preparing 'to go' meals, and driving volunteers and immigrants. Sister Cathy Doherty shared, "This experience was emotional and a heart opener."

Near Juarez and Anapra, Mexico, sisters meet with border patrol agents and work with refugees at a processing center. Sisters also assist adult immigrants who work in U.S. factories, care for unaccompanied minors, and support refugee women at a cancer center near San Antonio, Texas. "This has been a real gift for all of us," said Sister Kate DuVal. "Many moments of deep reflection on freedom, safety, peace, hope, community and so much more. The unbelievable patience these guests have hour after hour, day after day, is such a reminder of how much we take for granted."

Whether it is hands-on work or prayer and presence, Sisters from the Central Pacific Province are serving immigrant refugees wherever and however they are needed. ●



**Sister Rose Anthony Krebs, Sister Richarde Marie Wolf serve breakfast to refugees in El Paso, Texas.**  
*Photo: Sister Kate DuVal*



**Sister Kate DuVal arranging rides for refugees and volunteers**

## Responding to Pope Francis' call



**La casetta.** *Photo: Patricia Stortz, Generalate, Rome.*

By Sister Kathy Schmittgens (Generalate, Italy)

In Rome, Pope Francis made a direct appeal to religious congregations asking us to use our unoccupied spaces to house migrants and refugees. We turned to the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Centro Astalli program to help us respond.

On our Generalate property we have a small house, "la casetta", that originally was home to a preschool. Some cleanup and upgrades made it a perfect, safe living space. Our first guests were from Congo. They stayed for 14 months and are now on their own. Currently we are hosting a family from Pakistan. We feel blessed that we have been able to respond to Pope Francis' call to help people who are in such great need. ●

# Migration and the link to human trafficking

By Sister Helen Galadima (AF, Ghana)

In the July 2019 *Shalom Solidarity Reflection*, Sister Helen Galadima, an English teacher at Notre Dame Girls Senior High School in Sunyani, Ghana, wrote about the issue of human trafficking in the African context. She shared an encounter of her own that brought home for her how those migrating to find work can easily become victims of human trafficking.

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Sister Helen at a Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation seminar in Ghana. Photo: Province of Africa

I had heard of trafficking cases from others; however, I had not encountered anyone actually involved in trafficking until 2016. On a flight from Ghana to Rome, Italy, I entered into a conversation with Esi who sat near me. When I asked Esi where she was going, Esi replied that she was traveling to Kuwait.

She explained that in Ghana she was told by the recruitment agent who made the arrangements that Kuwait would be her destination. The agent explained that she would be going to work as a housekeeper. When asked if she knew what housekeeping meant, Esi replied in the negative.

A man who sat nearby overheard the conversation and exclaimed, “Hey”! He related the experience of his niece who became a victim of trafficking through a similar journey to Kuwait. By God’s grace, the niece was rescued by family members and returned home to Ghana.

After hearing about the niece’s experience, it dawned on Esi that Kuwait was the wrong place for her and the job that she was told was waiting did not really exist. ●

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## Links:

- [gerhardinger.org](http://gerhardinger.org)
- [United Nations](#)
- [Talitha Kum](#)

Trafficking is prevalent in all parts of the world. Where might it exist near you?

Migrant workers and job seekers, who constitute the majority of international migrants, are vulnerable to human trafficking throughout their migration process.

Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: forced labour and forced marriage. International Labour Office (ILO), Geneva, 2017, page 30.



# I was a stranger and you accepted me

(Mt 25:35)

By Sister M. Ireneia Książak (PO, Poland)

Jesus' words: "I was a stranger and you accepted me" (Mt 25:35) are a challenge for all, including us consecrated persons. Although we may have little influence on the decisions of politicians, we have a deep conviction that we should give our help first and foremost in the countries affected by armed conflicts and unrest. This is confirmed by appeals, led by local bishops, to help people remain in their own homes and countries, to help first on the spot.

The "Caritas Polska" organization took up this effort; it has helped over 8,500 Syrian families in Aleppo with the "Family to Family" program, supporting those most affected by the war. Many religious congregations, including some of our SSND communities, have taken part in this program, paying a certain amount each month to support a family in Aleppo. Using this

support, Syrian families are able to buy water, food, medicine and fuel for heating flats.

We realize that apart from helping in places affected by war, it is also necessary to help those who have fled to our country. In Poland, our sisters place themselves at the disposal of those in need, helping where we can. Sisters from one community assisted people in applying for Polish citizenship, in searching for employment, by providing appropriate housing for female students, and by supporting them with prayer. Another community is giving their chapel to a minor denomination in Poland for their monthly prayers.

As we accompany those in need, we try to understand contemporary migration. This is a critical and current challenge for the world and the Church, including consecrated persons. So we ask ourselves: What or who makes it necessary that hundreds of thousands of people are forced to migrate? ●



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Website image for the **Family to Family (Rodzina Rodzinie)** program of Caritas Polska.  
Source: Caritas Polska website. Used with permission.

