

ASEC



AFRICAN
SISTERS
EDUCATION
COLLABORATIVE

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Rays of Hope



Igniting Hope – Dare to Dream



Footprints of Hope: Service with Remarkable Impact

By Sr. Draru Mary Cecilia, LSMIG, ASEC Executive Director



Welcome to the 2025 edition of *Rays of Hope*.

In this issue, I invite ASEC's esteemed readers to reflect on the theme "Igniting Hope: Dare to Dream" with a focus on the core value of service. In *Rays of Hope* 2025, you will engage with the testimonies of Catholic sisters in Africa who are igniting hope through their service in ministry to the most vulnerable and poor, especially those in the margins of the society.

Catholic sisters who are served by ASEC, dare to dream with HOPE, the hope that never disappoints (Rom 5:5).

These sisters are a formidable force who have already impacted the lives of more than 9.5 million individuals and this number continues to grow!

What is the value of educating one Catholic sister in Africa? ASEC's experience and data indicate that training one sister in Africa on average translates into:

- Service to 9,829 individuals annually,
- Mentorship of 68 individuals,
- And the creation of 12 jobs.

Catholic sisters have not only taken leadership in the formation of individuals but also societies. In their ministries sisters have been champions of the 17 United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 for decades, long before they were officially proclaimed by the United Nations in 2015. **Consequently, firmly rooted in the prophetic mission and the spirit of ASEC's Founding Mothers, graduates of ASEC's programs are missionaries of hope in Africa and beyond.**

Picking up the baton of the last 25 years of incredible impact in this 26th year of ASEC, we recommit to continuing to ignite hope and nurture the culture of our Founding Mothers, who dared to dream, with boots on the ground and hands in service to humanity. **That is exactly the life of a**

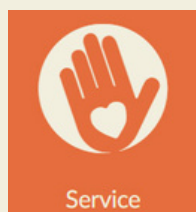
Catholic sister—"boots on the ground, gaze fixed on God in Jesus Christ" (Heb 12:2), hands adept at touching and cleaning the face of God in humanity; the needy people who live in the margins and periphery of society.

The call to ignite hope needs to sound louder today than ever before. Pope Francis invited members of the Catholic Church and every human person to be "Pilgrims of Hope" at the launch of the Jubilee Year of Hope in December 2024. Pope Leo XIV reminded us in August 2025 that "Christian hope isn't escape—but a courageous choice to love and give, even in suffering. True hope isn't evasion; it's a decision. We find true hope when we give of ourselves freely."

Therefore, ASEC invites you to dare to dream, even when our daily life experiences point to the opposite—God is faithful to his promise of a world where it is good to be (Hab 2: 1-4)!

Your support for ASEC provides the impetus and courage that moves sisters into action in mission; a mission that gives those in need the ability to dare to nurture the dream for a better world, where it is good to be. Sisters hold in their hands the light of faith that neither fades nor grows dim (Jn 8:12), and your collaboration allows them to continue igniting hope in spaces where shining their light is most vital. **I invite you to ignite hope and dare to dream to serve humanity with ASEC!** Together we can reignite hope through the prophetic witness of Catholic sisters.

Will you join hands with the Catholic sisters in Africa as companions in this pilgrim's journey? The assurance of your presence, prayer, and support will strengthen hope in the sisters as they fulfill their mission with courage and zeal to those entrusted in their care. **Together with the sisters, your support is sure to leave footprints of hope through service that has a remarkable impact.**



Service

In this edition of *Rays of Hope*, we'll explore **service**, one of ASEC's six core values.

ASEC cultivates a spirit of service by promoting social responsibility and community engagement to meet the needs of society. ASEC recognizes that sisters in Africa devote their lives to service with compassion, humility, love, and protection for all of God's creation.

The Generative Effects of Service

By Mary L. Gautier, PhD, ASEC Board of Directors, Secretary 2025-2026

What a year this has been! ASEC's 25th anniversary celebration, culminating in a very successful gala at Chestnut Hill College on December 7th, 2024, was just the beginning. Recognizing the "Founding Mothers" of ASEC in such a public way really brought home for me an important lesson—the generative effects of service. These seven generous sisters had no clear understanding at the time of the eventual impact this organization would have on the lives of religious sisters in Africa; they only knew that they were mutually called to create something new as an act of service in response to the gifts they had been given by God. Yet here we are, 25 years later, celebrating the fact that the non-profit they created, ASEC, has grown exponentially and has served well over 10,000 African sisters with education, leadership training, skills development, and capacity building. This is truly an example of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes!



in schools, in clinics, and in social settings, and I witnessed the transformative impact of their education in their own lives and in the lives of those they serve.

A third, and most concrete example of the generative effects of service presented itself in Cameroon, where I had traveled to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of profession of Sr. Clarisse Remjika Jaiwo, SST, who is the SLDI Africa Coordinator and the ASEC Country Director for Cameroon. While I had a wonderful time celebrating this milestone event with Sr. Clarisse and her sisters, family, and friends, I was most struck by a "field trip" she took a few of us on, to visit a construction site she is overseeing. Far out in the countryside, in a location that seemed nearly inaccessible to me, on land donated by the Diocese of Kumba to the Association of Religious in the Ecclesiastical Province of Bamenda, is the beginning of a two-story compound that will eventually house and train sisters from around Cameroon who are undergoing SLDI training as well as other programs of the Association of Religious. While it looked like a primitive collection of wood, rebar, and cement to me, Sr. Clarisse was able to bring to life her vision of where the sisters would be housed, where the classrooms, computer lab, kitchen, library, and chapel would be, and how this structure would transform SLDI formation for Cameroon. Our excitement grew as she spoke. At the end, she showed us a small tropical tree that had been planted in the enclosed compound during their local celebration of ASEC@25. The tree was symbolic to that event and also served as a sign of hope for this project, which was spearheaded by ASEC staff in Cameroon and supported by ASEC alumnae and the Association of Religious. That tree was already bearing fruit!



I witnessed another example of the generative effects of service later that same month, when I traveled to Africa to witness and celebrate the graduation of 118 Kenyan sisters from ASEC's SLDI program. Altogether, there are now more than 4,500 African sisters who have graduated from SLDI. These alumnae are now in leadership positions in their congregations, in their sponsored ministries, in local communities and in the national and multi-national associations of sisters in Africa and beyond. They are CEOs of schools, hospitals, clinics, and many NGOs. They create jobs, win grant awards, and empower women. SLDI alumnae have launched community sustainability and improvement projects, created over 5,000 jobs in underserved and rural communities, and serve more than 850,000 people annually in places where help is most needed.

Everywhere I traveled during my stay in Africa, I saw the fruits of this program. Over and over again, smiling sisters approached to say to me "I am an ASEC alumna!" I saw them

Finally, this year has shown me the generative effects of service in my fellow ASEC board members. From gala preparation to board recruitment to committee service, fellow board members have really stepped up to the plate and provided generously of their time, their many talents, and even their treasure, to ignite hope for a bright future for ASEC during its next 25 years.



ASEC Programs

Catholic sisters **dedicate their lives to service**. Their vital work improves the social, spiritual, healthcare, educational, environmental, and economic conditions of society. Many sisters in Africa, although in professional positions, lack the higher education credentials, training, and/or resources they need to support the communities they live and work in. **ASEC fills this gap by delivering programs** that enable sisters to achieve the fullest impact of their ministries and ensure the sustainability of their religious institutes.

The Programs Unit at the African Sisters Education Collaborative, or ASEC, is dedicated to **delivering high quality programs that are molded to meet the specific needs of sisters** serving in the communities of Africa south of the Sahara.

Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI)*

SLDI provides sisters with technology, administration, and finance training through three one-month workshops over three years. Through SLDI, sisters gain the practical skills and confidence to build strong networks and take up leadership roles in their congregations and communities. Since 2007.

Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA)*

HESA provides opportunities for sisters to access higher education (diploma, undergraduate, and master's degrees). HESA is delivered through partnerships with higher education institutions in Africa and online in the United States Since 2013.

Research Initiative

The Research Initiative aims to promote research on Catholic sisters in Africa, increase African women religious' research skills, provide opportunities for them to engage in research projects, and develop ASEC as a central repository of data related to women religious in Africa. Since 2010.



SLDI*



HESA*

The Scholarship Program

The Scholarship Program bridges the gap to higher education for sisters by providing scholarships to complete secondary school or higher education credentials, including at the doctoral level, relevant to their ministries. Many of our scholarship recipients continue their education through the HESA program. Since 2012.

Service Learning

Students and sisters from ASEC corporate member institutions participate in annual service trips to Africa. Accompanied by mentors, U.S. participants travel to Africa for three weeks and are immersed in a wide range of volunteer opportunities, serving side-by-side with African sisters. Since 2008.

Alumni Programming

Alumni Programming supports individuals who have graduated from ASEC's program(s) by offering ongoing professional development, networking, and leadership opportunities. The alumni network keeps graduates connected and sharing resources to strengthen their impact across Africa. Since 2010.

***Made possible by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.**



Research Initiative



Scholarship



Service Learning



Alumni Programing

Bridging the Gap to Higher Education in Malawi

By Tara Lopatofsky, PhD, CCLS

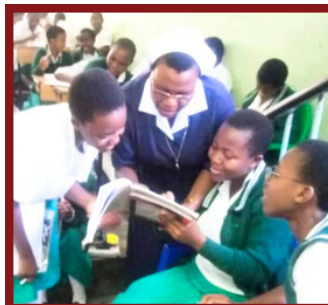
ASEC Senior Program Manager, Monitoring & Evaluation (M & E)

Compassionate encouragement and support can make all the difference in a child's successful completion of secondary education in Malawi. Sr. Agnes Mmanga of the Sisters of Our Lady of Amersfoort (SOL) understands this on a personal level. With the help of the ASEC Scholarship Program, she returned to secondary school as an adult to qualify to earn the higher education credentials needed to serve as a teacher. Now a three-time graduate of ASEC programs, Sr. Agnes provides that same encouragement to students with special needs at Stella Maris Girls Secondary School.

In Malawi, higher education enrollment is among the lowest in the world. Admission to universities is based on passing the Malawi Certificate of Education (MCE) exams, and excellent scores are necessary to even be considered for enrollment. For the 2024-2025 academic year, just 58% of qualified applicants were accepted to universities in Malawi. Strong secondary education is essential to perform well on the MCE exams.

Sr. Agnes "never expected to be a teacher of someone someday." Her MCE scores when she entered religious life were low; the bachelor's degree required to become a teacher seemed a distant dream.

Sr. Agnes' congregation sent her to complete the Administration Track of ASEC's SLDI program. With encouragement from ASEC Malawi staff, Sr. Agnes and her superior agreed that participating in the ASEC Scholarship Program to retake Forms 3 and 4 of secondary school would be beneficial. Believing in her potential paid off—she received some of the highest MCE scores in her class and was admitted to the Catholic University of Malawi through ASEC's HESA program to earn a Bachelor of Education (Special Needs). While awaiting graduation, she already



Sr. Agnes Mmanga, SOL, with her students at Stella Maris Girls Secondary School in Malawi.

serves as a special needs teacher and as office manager at Stella Maris Girls Secondary School. Of her teaching, she explains: **"Most of the time they are slow to learn things. So sometimes when I see that they haven't understood, they did not catch well with their peers, then I always create time for them, one-to-one, so that they can have a better understanding of the concept for them to excel in their exams."** As the school's office manager, she also continues to utilize the skills she acquired from SLDI.

Sr. Agnes is one of just 11 sisters who have had the opportunity to participate in 3 ASEC programs. She recognizes this as a gift and now seeks to give back through her ministry. With her unique journey, she is well-positioned to support young women who need the same encouragement she once received. Through her work, she is helping to create lasting positive change, an example of how the ASEC Scholarship Program serves as a bridge for sisters to unlock their full potential.

Sr. Agnes' journey reflects the broader impact of ASEC alumnae across Africa, many of whom continue to learn, connect, and share their experiences through ASEC's Alumnae Workshops. In 2025 alone, **alumnae were served 1,546 times through 22 workshops held in 10 countries, with 1,522 unique sisters** participating. These gatherings brought together graduates of SLDI, HESA, and the Scholarship Program, offering opportunities for mentorship, collaboration, and continued growth. In fact, **97% of SLDI alumnae and 98% of HESA alumnae report that the workshops met or exceeded their expectations.** With attendance surpassing projections, **35% of all SLDI and/or HESA alumnae participated in 2025.** The workshops continue to strengthen the ASEC network and ensure that sisters like Sr. Agnes remain supported as they use their education to transform their communities.



HESA

Investigating the Impact of the HESA Program

Higher Education for Sisters in Africa

By Tara Lopatofsky, PhD, CCLS, ASEC Senior Program Manager, M & E

As part of their academic course of study, many participants of the Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA) program are required to make original research contributions prior to completion of their degrees. These final research projects are often quite rigorous in nature, requiring empirical work to generate new knowledge, advance the sisters' field of study, and provide fresh perspectives on important ideas. This is somewhat distinctive to the African countries where HESA operates, especially at the bachelors degree level, as full research studies are usually not undertaken until the masters or doctoral levels in the United States.

Sr. Lydiah Shiroti of the Sisters of Mary of Kakamega (SMK) attended Tangaza University in Kenya, earning a Bachelor of Education through HESA. For her research requirement, she examined the impact of the HESA program on societal transformation. Her study, *The Impact of the HESA Program on Societal Transformation: A Case Study of Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Tangaza University College, and Chemchemi Alumni*, was especially significant, as few studies external to ASEC have been conducted on the impact of the HESA program.

Using a mixed-methods approach, Sr. Lydiah gathered data from 44 HESA alumnae in Kenya through questionnaires and interviews. Results indicated that the education gained through HESA has contributed to societal transformation. Her study highlighted alumnae-led initiatives such as farming projects, fundraising endeavors, and the founding of small businesses. She also found that HESA supports the spiritual development of Catholic sisters, strengthening their love for God and humanity.



***In their own words, alumnae reported
“having gained leadership skills,
teamwork, self-improvement, critical
skills for analyzing issues, making the
right judgments, being ethical, and
understanding reality.”***

***Many of the results discovered through
Sr. Lydiah’s study mirror HESA
evaluation outcomes, further affirming
HESA’s lasting impact.***



96% of HESA alumnae report receiving degrees that are relevant to their ministry and needed in their community.



98% of HESA graduates feel more confident as a result of participating in the HESA program.



HESA maintains a 96% retention rate, indicating that the majority of sisters who enroll complete their studies.



Sr. Lydiah Shiroti, SMK, with young children in her village (left) and after completing community service in Malawi (right).

Sr. Lydiah's study provides further proof of the incredible and far-reaching impact of the HESA program. As of June 30, 2025 has served 2,333 unique sisters from 283 congregations across 10 countries. **In Phase IV, Year 1 (July 2024-June 2025), 155 new sisters were recruited and enrolled in the HESA program.** Sisters were served a total of 1,372 times through HESA related activities including Orientation, Reflective Learning, and Alumnae Workshops, with nearly all participants reporting gains in competencies and leadership capacity. To date, **1,729 sisters have graduated from HESA,** with more than half (51%) earning honors, including 243 First Class and 369 Second Class degrees. Education remains the most common field of study (45%), but sisters are also pursuing degrees in economics, medical sciences, theology, and other disciplines vital to their communities. These achievements affirm the findings of Sr. Lydiah's study: HESA not only equips sisters for professional service but also nurtures spiritual growth and leadership, enabling them to bring transformative change to the people and communities they serve.

Since graduating from Tangaza University in November 2024, Sr. Lydiah has been serving her congregation as a novice formator in Tanzania, preparing young sisters for religious life. In the coming school year, she will begin teaching as a primary school teacher. A strong advocate for HESA, Sr. Lydiah continues to recommend the program's expansion so that even more sisters can benefit from its transformative opportunities.

SLDI

Hope for Uganda's Elderly & Injured

Sisters Leadership Development Initiative

By Sneh Akruvala, PhD, RN, ASEC Program Manager, M & E



Augustine Kitonsa, a Ugandan man, has experienced a transformative journey under the support of the Good Samaritan Sisters (GSS) and specifically Sr. Regina Nakyeyune Lawrence, GSS, a Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI) alum. As a child, Augustine suffered a severe fall from a mango tree, which left him with significant injuries and in need of a wheelchair. Before knowing the GSS, Augustine was in a state of despair, suffering from wounds and ulcers, and unable to sit due to pain. His family was not in a position to provide the necessary care, leaving him without hope and waiting for God to call him home.

His community introduced Augustine to Sr. Regina, who brought him to the Mapeera Bakateyamba Center, where she serves as director, and was able to provide him with medical treatment and a wheelchair, greatly improving his quality of life. GSS provided him with food, clothing, and timely care, and now Augustine has found purpose and a sense of belonging. He contributes by preparing yams and making rosaries, activities that allow him to give back to the community.

The Mapeera Bakateyamba Center in Uganda serves up to 60 individuals, including the elderly and disabled. As the center's administrator, Sr. Regina faced the challenge of insufficient food supplies needed to sustain the individuals living in the home. Utilizing her SLDI training, she assessed community resources and identified available land and a vehicle. She initiated a farming project to grow food for the home and community, as well as to produce cash crops and raise animals. Starting with a single acre of banana plantation, the farm has expanded to include nine acres of bananas, four acres of yams, one acre of sugarcane, and numerous cows.



855,350+ million people, mostly in rural areas, are served by SLDI alumnae annually.



35,820+ individuals have been mentored by SLDI alumnae.



Sr. Regina Nakyeyune Lawrence, GSS (left), speaks alongside Augustine Kitonsa (right), a resident of Mapeera Bakateyamba Center.



Sr. Regina stands on the grounds of Mapeera Bakateyamba Center in Uganda, where she leads efforts to care for the elderly and persons with disabilities.

Recognizing the need for sustainable income, Sr. Regina made efforts to mobilize local resources. She has written a project proposal for home renovation, and heavily relies on income-generating activities and local support. The farm now feeds over 100 people, including sisters, many of whom are ill, and people with disabilities, while also generating income by selling the excess harvest. Residents contribute by bringing produce to the market for sale.

Sr. Regina also organizes workshops for sisters to learn from her project, providing an additional income stream, and excels in local resource mobilization, raising funds for renovations and constructing a perimeter wall through Christmas carol fundraising. An American donor, inspired by seeing Sr. Regina on TV, completed the wall project, a testament to her ability to attract support through creative and resourceful means.

Sr. Regina's work at the Mapeera Bakateyamba Center was strengthened by her participation in ASEC's SLDI program that has trained thousands of women religious across Africa since 2007. Phase VI of SLDI (April 1, 2022–March 31, 2025) focused on enhancing leadership, administrative, financial, and technology competencies, helping alumnae to become lifelong learners, mentors, and leaders. In Phase VI alone, **886 sisters participated in 110 SLDI workshops**, alongside additional workshops for alumnae and institutional capacity building. **SLDI participants reported high-impact outcomes:** 100% demonstrated increased leadership competency, 98% felt prepared to mentor others, 97% indicated their workshop expectations were met or exceeded, and 90% implemented improvements in their ministries since completing their SLDI training. Programs like SLDI empower leaders like Sr. Regina to develop sustainable projects, mobilize community resources, and positively transform the lives of individuals like Augustine.

Augustine has expressed profound gratitude to God and GSS for their support. He acknowledges the significant changes in his life since joining the center, including the opportunity to participate in workshops. Augustine remains hopeful for the future, praying for the day he can return home and support himself.

Scholarship

Reducing Maternal Mortality in Malawi

ASEC Scholarship Program



By Isabelle Henry, ASEC Program Coordinator, Programs

A mother of three in labor walks to the doors of St. Kalemba Community Hospital in Bangula, Malawi. She knows childbirth is never routine, but she trusts the care she will receive at the hospital. Despite being told that pregnancies with complications should be transferred to the larger, more specialized district hospital run by the government, many locals in the area opt to deliver at St. Kalemba for the high-quality care provided by the Sisters of Our Lady of Amersfoort (SOL), the congregation of Catholic sisters who run the health institution. This woman will encounter complications with her delivery, but thankfully, she is in the expert care of Sr. Maureen J. Chalamanda, SOL, a three-time graduate of ASEC's programs.

Utilizing the knowledge and skills she gained from ASEC's Programs, Sr. Maureen could quickly evaluate the woman on arrival. Sr. Maureen discovered that the woman had a cord presentation, a rare and potentially fatal complication that often requires an emergency cesarean section (C-section). However, this procedure would require an operating theater, a facility not currently available at St. Kalemba. The woman's labor was progressing quickly, and there was no time to call for a transfer by ambulance. Sr. Maureen sprang into action, immediately calling for assistance and implementing necessary interventions to ensure a safe delivery. "Five minutes later," Sr. Maureen reported, "I was able to help this woman deliver a healthy baby without any complications, and the baby was able to cry ... she was okay, so I was very happy."

Without Sr. Maureen's knowledge and quick thinking, the outcome for this mother and child could have been catastrophic. It is for this reason that Sr. Maureen is a vital asset for vulnerable individuals in her community.



Sr. Maureen J. Chalamanda, SOL (left).



98% report being able to utilize the knowledge and skills they acquired from the Scholarship Program to benefit their ministry.



More than 720 ASEC-sponsored sisters and women have graduated from their programs of study.



More than 1,069 scholarships were awarded through ASEC since 2012.

Sr. Maureen J. Chalamanda, SOL, providing treatment in her rural outreach program.



Sr. Maureen completed three ASEC programs, including SLDI (Administration Track 2015), the Scholarship Program (Secondary/Form Level 2018), and HESA (Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Midwifery 2024). This is representative of the educational context of Malawi, where admission to universities is entirely dependent upon secondary school national examination results. When Sr. Maureen entered religious life, she did not possess the scores necessary for higher education. With the strong support of ASEC Malawi Staff and the Scholarship Program, she was able to retake secondary school and achieve the scores necessary for entry into her Bachelor's Degree. Today, Sr. Maureen is a shining example of the impact ASEC programs have, not only on the sisters who participate in them, but in the lives of those they serve as well.

Sr. Maureen said, "ASEC programs have significantly enhanced my ability to serve in healthcare by equipping me with essential skills in patient care, medical administration, leadership, and ethical decision making. The training has helped me improve service delivery, promote compassionate care, and advocate for better health conditions, especially in underserved communities."

Sr. Maureen's ministry makes a positive impact on global sustainable development. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3.1, under Good Health and Well-Being, aims to reduce the global maternal mortality ratio (MMR) to less than 70 per 100,000 live births. MMR is the ratio of women who die from pregnancy-related issues. It is currently estimated that 381 deaths occur per 100,000 live births in Malawi. Limited access to healthcare due to distance, a shortage of skilled medical staff, and poor-quality care, among other factors, negatively impact Malawi's MMR. Working to alleviate this considerably high MMR, Sr. Maureen applied her skills and expertise to evaluate and care for expecting mothers. With Sr. Maureen's help, the hospital can now administer quality treatment to approximately 42,000 individuals annually.

Another significant accomplishment of Sr. Maureen was her assistance in the establishment of a rural community health outreach program in Malawi. The program, developed in partnership with the Association of Women Religious in Malawi (AWRIM) and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, aims to improve maternal and child health services for those without access to healthcare. The outreach program serves people from 22 villages through in-person visits three times per week. This initiative has enabled underserved populations to reap necessary knowledge, medical screenings, and treatments from healthcare professionals they otherwise may not receive due to location or lack of awareness.

ASEC Board of Directors member and Sr. Maureen's former SLDI facilitator in 2015, Bríghid Blake, said of Sr. Maureen's progress and impact, "I followed her progress for several years and was aware of her ability, her confidence that she could succeed if given the opportunity, and her determination to do it despite the obstacles."

Sr. Maureen's continuous work to improve the lives of those in need makes her a crucial agent of change in her community. Through quality healthcare, education, and advocating for better health policies, she helps build a healthier and more informed society.

Predicting Future Deforestation Levels in Malawi

By Tara Lopatofsky, PhD, CCLS, ASEC Senior Program Manager, M & E

In Malawi, a forest the size of a soccer field is cut down every 10 minutes. Deforestation, or the loss of tree cover over a period of time, has a massive impact on the environment. Integrally connected to ecosystems, deforestation contributes to climate change, disrupts the water cycle, reduces biodiversity, and increases soil erosion. As the United Nations states under SDG 15: Life on Land, "A flourishing life on land is the foundation for our life on this planet. We are all part of the planet's ecosystem, and we have caused severe damage to it through deforestation...Promoting a sustainable use of our ecosystems and preserving biodiversity is not a cause. It is the key to our own survival."

HESA graduate, Sr. Agnes Kachali of the Sisters of the Holy Rosary (SHR) recognizes the importance of combating deforestation, particularly in her home district of Mzimba, Malawi. As part of her HESA Bachelor of Education in Geography degree at the Catholic University of Malawi, Sr. Agnes completed a research study entitled *Predicting Future Levels of Deforestation Using Remote Sensing in Mzimba District*. Sr. Agnes' study used a mixed methods Earth observation technique to predict future deforestation trends in Mzimba for 2030. Her findings indicate that, without intervention, Mzimba District can expect to see further declining trends in vegetative cover by 2030, to the detriment of Malawi's citizens.

In order to combat deforestation, Sr. Agnes recommends an increase in community education, the use of alternative fuel sources, stricter logging regulations, reforestation programs, and international collaborative efforts. After graduating from the HESA program in September 2024, Sr. Agnes began teaching geography at Kaseye Girls Secondary School in Chitipa District, Malawi. In this position, she is charged with instructing 90 girls annually at the Form 1 level. As she herself was inspired to pursue a geography degree by a passionate teacher in her youth, Sr. Agnes hopes to foster a love for the planet, nature, and the beauty of the physical environment in her young students. Sr. Agnes' determination and competence, achieved through completion of her degree via the HESA program, are evident in her school's 94% average pass rate on the Malawi School Certificate of Education Exam, well over the national average pass rate of 56%.

Of her participation in ASEC's HESA program, Sr. Agnes said, "ASEC supported me financially, materially, and psychologically. I truly appreciate ASEC. That is why I am here today." Sr. Agnes continues to spread awareness of the negative impact of deforestation as a teacher in the classroom and in the broader community. Using her research study results, Sr. Agnes informs others about the consequences of deforestation; she hopes to inspire the generation of practical solutions that will have long-lasting positive environmental effects. Moreover, Sr. Agnes' efforts are stimulating tangible shifts, as some of her pupils have been motivated to plant trees in opposition to deforestation in Mzimba District. These seemingly small gestures plant the seed for cascading change, with the potential to heal our planet and improve all of our "lives on land."



Sr. Agnes Kachali, SHR, and her pupils, working to inform others about the consequences of deforestation.

ASEC's Research Contributions

Since 2019, ASEC has made great effort to disseminate research related to Catholic sisters in Africa—producing 14 scholarly research publications and presenting at 66 national conferences and events. Including:

- 1 Journal Article Under Consideration
- 2 Doctoral Dissertations Defended
- 3 Book Chapters Published
- 8 Academic Journal Articles Published



Imagine! The Power of Service in Kenya

By Sneh Akruvala, PhD, RN, ASEC Program Manager, M & E & Sarah Martin, PhD, ASEC Program Coordinator, Programs

Imagine a barren piece of land transformed into a thriving sanctuary for young girls, a place for them to feel loved, cherished, and secure—this is the Dorothea Rescue Center.

In 2024 and 2025, ASEC Service Learning participants had the opportunity to conduct service activities at the Dorothea Rescue Center in Tala, Kenya. Both years the participants were comprised of students, faculty mentors, and religious sisters from Marywood University and Chestnut Hill College. Sr. Caroline Ngati, ASE, the center's director, became a vital part of the program—inspiring others to imagine a world where it is good for all to be.

Since arriving at the center in 2021, Sr. Caroline has overseen incredible growth in the service the center is able to provide. The word "imagine" became her powerful mantra, encapsulating the remarkable progress and success achieved. In dedication to Sr. Caroline's infectious spirit, "Imagine!" also became the slogan of the 2025 Service Learning experience. Through Sr. Caroline's tireless efforts, the rescue center went from desolate land to a vibrant community, complete with a school, health center, and home for young girls from the street. She inspires everyone to envision what is possible and to diligently work towards achieving those goals.

Hosting Service Learning groups in 2024 and 2025, Sr. Caroline observed first-hand the students' exceptional commitment and ability to seamlessly integrate with the local team in Kenya, feeling more like family than visitors or participants.

A mentee of an SLDI alum herself, Sr. Caroline understands ASEC's commitment to providing educational opportunities and the importance of building bonds with the community. She credits the strong relationship formed between her team and ASEC staff for the success of the trips. Sr. Caroline made a point to engage as much as possible with the students, even taking on the role of their driver to other service sites. **This level of involvement fostered a warm, congenial atmosphere, with everyone—from the staff at various sites to the girls at the center—viewing the trip participants as extensions of their own families.** Although next year's trip will not be returning to Kenya, she warmly invites Service Learning alumni to visit whenever they wish.

Since 2008, ASEC's Service Learning Program has **engaged 154 individuals and completed 9 successful trips to either Tanzania, Ghana, or Kenya.** The program provides students, sisters, and mentors in the United States with authentic cultural immersion experiences in order to build cross-cultural awareness and mutual respect. Program participants provide a variety of service while on their trips including tutoring young children, participating in food distributions, and providing social services support, among others.

In 2025, Service Learning participants provided service at six different sites, all assisted by their inspiring site host, Sr. Caroline. As the program looks towards next year's trip to a new ASEC country, Sr. Caroline encourages future site hosts to cultivate and maintain close ties. Through her leadership and commitment, Sr. Caroline has demonstrated how strong relationships and community engagement can enhance the Service Learning experience, leaving a profound and enduring impact on all involved.



Clockwise from top left: Sr. Caroline Ngati, ASE, 2025 Service Learning student, student engages in expressive art therapy with children at the Dorothea Rescue Center.

SISTERS IGNITING HOPE

IN SERVICE ACROSS AFRICA



ZAMBIA
Sr. Juliana Chibaula Zulu, RGS



SOUTH SUDAN
Sr. Rose Amviko, SHS



CAMEROON
Sr. Marie Mballa Ekassi
Alphonsine, TSSF



TANZANIA
Sr. Anither Abraham Msemwa, OSP



MALAWI
Sr. Florence Lily
Msowoya, SHR



UGANDA
Sr. Mary Cross Tumuhimbise, MSMMC



GHANA
Sr. Stephany Ayomah, SMI



NIGERIA
Sr. Mary-Ben Omoso
Onimhawa, SSH



ZIMBABWE
Sr. Mercy Machona, CMFC



KENYA
Sr. Teresa Jepkosgei Yator, ASE



LESOTHO
Sr. Augustina Limakatso Thokoa, SNJM

Igniting Hope for the Future of ASEC

By Sr. Nancy Kamau, LSOSF, Development Director, Mission Advancement (MA) & Maureen Elliott, Assistant Development Director, MA

ASEC stands as a beacon of hope and empowerment across Africa south of the Sahara. Through education, leadership development, and collaboration, ASEC equips Catholic sisters with the tools to uplift communities and lead systemic change. As the world continues to grow and evolve, so does the opportunity to strengthen our impact. Embracing sustainability allows ASEC to build on its successes and ensure that Catholic sisters remain a vital force in healthcare, education, pastoral care, and social services, not just today, but for generations to come.

At the core of Catholic sisters' mission is a profound commitment to service. Sisters educated through ASEC's programs in Africa aren't just improving their own lives, they are *Rays of Hope* transforming entire communities. Once equipped, women religious go on to open schools, launch health clinics, provide spiritual and trauma counseling centers, and advocate fiercely for the marginalized. Their leadership is one of the most sustainable and powerful forces driving development across Africa today.

Why Sustainability Matters

ASEC operates in regions shaped by educational disparities, economic instability, and social inequality. At the same time, the need for compassionate, community-based service, the kind that sisters uniquely provide, continues to grow. By prioritizing sustainability, we ensure the sisters' ability to lead and serve extends far beyond today's programs, securing a vibrant empowered future for generations ahead.

ASEC's Path to Sustainability: Key Pillars

1. Mission-Aligned, Diversified Funding

ASEC's mission thrives through the generous support of our donors. To build long-term stability and reduce reliance on traditional funding cycles, ASEC is actively expanding its community of supporters, including recurring monthly donors and the next generation of philanthropists. Additionally, we are increasing donor cultivation and hosting fundraising events to engage supporters and share our impact.

2. Supporting Sisters as Leaders & Changemakers

ASEC's programs go beyond education to inspire true transformation. The Programs unit continues to develop leadership programs that enable sisters to lead with confidence and compassion. This includes expanding opportunities for advocacy and policy engagement, challenging traditions that marginalize vulnerable groups, promoting alumnae mentorship, and supporting community-led initiatives. We are building a resilient network of leaders driving positive change from within their communities and organizations. At the same time, we continue to explore innovative opportunities that align with our values to sustain our transformative work.

3. Data-Driven Impact

Our dedicated M & E unit captures the inspiring stories of sisters transforming their communities. Beyond data collection and analysis, the team creates compelling visuals and reports that highlight the long-term impact of ASEC's programs. This approach not only demonstrates accountability but celebrates the ripple effect of our shared mission.

4. Strengthening Partnerships & Embracing Innovation

Built on collaboration, ASEC thrives by deepening local and global partnerships with universities, religious institutes, non-governmental organizations, and other mission-aligned organizations. At the same time, we embrace innovation to stay at the forefront of global issues affecting our world. Through online and blended learning models, sisters in Africa access quality education regardless of their location. By integrating technology and nurturing vibrant digital alumnae communities, we help ensure sisters remain spiritually grounded and technically equipped to meet evolving needs.

A Mission Worth Sustaining

ASEC's future depends on scaling our philanthropy by diversifying funding, building organizational capacity, leveraging data and technology, and strengthening partnerships.



A Letter from the Mission Advancement Unit



From left Sr. Clarisse Remjika Jaiwo, SST, Sr. Nancy Kamau, LSOSF, and Sr. Lina Wanjiku Ndugh'u, SE, during a LCWR Pilgrimage of Hope walk.

With your continued support, Catholic sisters in Africa will continue to thrive, lead, and uplift generations to come.

Will you be a Ray of Hope in their journey?

Make your promise today at asec-sldi.org/donate

Receive warm greetings from the MA Unit at ASEC!

As we conclude another impactful year, I extend our heartfelt gratitude for your steadfast support and belief in our mission. Your generosity and partnership make it possible for ASEC to empower Catholic sisters across Africa, women religious who are bringing lasting change to their communities through education, leadership, and compassionate service.

This past year was particularly meaningful as we marked a major milestone: ASEC's 25th Anniversary. Our anniversary gala was a beautiful celebration of our journey, honoring our Founding Mothers, whose vision gave life to this mission, and recognizing the many Catholic sisters whose tireless efforts continue to uplift underserved and often forgotten communities. Through your support, these sisters are becoming agents of transformation across the continent.

Since our founding in 1999, ASEC has grown significantly in both reach and impact. Today, we serve sisters in 11 African countries, equipping them with leadership skills and providing them with access to education. With the continued support of visionary partners like the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, and with donors like you by our side, ASEC is leading a movement to strengthen the capacity of women religious in Africa.

We are truly grateful to have you as part of the ASEC family. Thank you for walking with us and for believing in the transformative power of education and religious life. Through education, we are shaping a brighter future, empowering individuals, strengthening communities, and uplifting society, one step at a time.

As we look forward to the next 25 years, the goal of ASEC's

Mission Advancement Unit is to scale up philanthropy, to deepen and expand the support that sustains this vital work. We are committed to building a stronger foundation of generosity that will allow more sisters to access quality education, leadership training, and spiritual growth opportunities. With your continued partnership, we will strengthen our programs, grow our impact, and ensure that Catholic sisters across Africa have the tools they need to be effective, faith-filled leaders of change.

Service lies at the heart of our mission. Catholic sisters often work in remote villages, conflict zones, and areas where essential services are scarce or nonexistent. They are the quiet, tireless hands behind schools, rural health clinics, orphanages, homes for individuals with disabilities, peacebuilding initiatives, and much more. Through it all, sisters in Africa continue to be Rays of Hope, bringing light, healing, and faith to those in greatest need.

With Sincere Appreciation,

Sr. Nancy Kamau, LSOSF
ASEC Director of Development, MA



Sr. Draru Mary Cecilia, LSMIG, joins the Diocese of Scranton during Jubilee Year Pilgrimage in Washington, DC.

REALIZING DREAMS AT BIGWA

By Sarah Martin, PhD; ASEC Program Coordinator, Programs



For over 20 years, ASEC has been lending support to the Bigwa Secondary School, a high school located in Morogoro, Tanzania.

Initially, this was a project intended to help the school advance from its “O-Level” status to that of “A-Level” (meaning that graduates were qualified to move on to the college or university level). To that end, ASEC helped to secure funding that allowed the school to make improvements in its facilities, curriculum, and faculty. In 2012, ASEC made the step to fund the education of a small group of women religious, creating the first cohort of what came to be ASEC’s Scholarship Program. From that premiere group of eleven women, the program has grown to more than fifty being supported during the 2024-2025 school year, including four girls from families who are not able to pay for their child’s education.

Sr. Florence Mkwizu, CICM, current Headmistress of Bigwa, shared her thoughts on the partnership between ASEC and the school. As an alumna of Bigwa herself, Sr. Florence has been able to witness the changes that have taken place over the years. Some of the most visible improvements have been to the school itself, including building a dining hall and dormitory as well as the construction of a new science laboratory consisting of well-equipped biology, physics, and chemistry labs. One particular benefit has been that the school now has improved food security, stemming both from having more funds to buy food and also from having been able to pursue projects that help them be more self-sufficient. These include installing a fish pond, better-quality gardening, and the tending of poultry, pigs, and cows.

Bigwa’s mission is “to serve the church and society with confidence, love, maturity, and professionalism,” and their continuous dedication to their students and their high academic standards has been recognized in their region. In 2019, the school was awarded Tanzania’s Best Academic Performance Award in the category of Most Improved



Students learn in a science laboratory at Bigwa Secondary School.

Schools. This award recognizes schools that achieve high performance in national examinations. Sr. Florence also shared that, in addition to classwork, Bigwa has a number of extra-curricular activities, including sports and hand work. These opportunities, as she states, “help them to develop their talents and contribute positively both at school and in the society around Bigwa.”

“Many parents are attracted to bring their children to our school because they want them to have good discipline and learn other skills like working in the fish pond, gardening, poultry, and cooking.”

-Sr. Florence Mkwizu, CICM

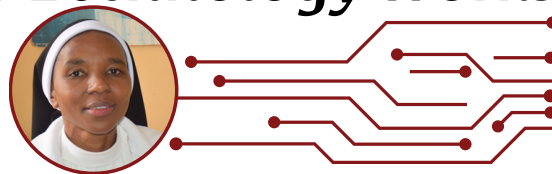
What Sr. Florence talked about most was the school’s positive impact on the people of Bigwa. A number of the sisters who now work there were sponsored by ASEC, including the second mistress and the school accountant. The surrounding community also shares in Bigwa’s success, as the school employs many as cooks, matrons, gardeners, security guards, etc. Graduates from Bigwa, religious and lay women alike, go on to work in many different areas, including health care, social work, and as catechists, lawyers, etc. The school’s positive reputation has led to increases in enrollment. **ASEC is proud to have been able to play a role in creating such a positive learning environment and is excited to see what the future may hold for Bigwa.**

Students play netball at Bigwa in Tanzania.



The Impact of SLDI's Basic Technology Workshops

By Sr. Lucia Ngaba, OP, SLDI Basic Technology Workshop Participant



My name is Sr. Lucia Ngaba, OP, a Dominican Contemplative nun from Nairobi, Kenya. Learning basic technology through ASEC's SLDI program has been an eye-opening and empowering journey for me. Before starting the course, I could hardly imagine how much these tools, PowerPoint, Publisher, Excel, among others, would enrich both my personal work and the life of my community. **Now, I can confidently say that these skills have become part of my daily contribution to our mission.**



Sr. Lucia Ngaba, OP (second from left), with SLDI Basic Technology Workshop participants in Nairobi, Kenya.

PowerPoint was my first and most fascinating area of discovery. I learned how to create presentations that are not only informative but also engaging. The most exciting part was making photo videos for my sisters. By combining images, text, background music, and smooth slide transitions, I was able to bring our shared memories to life. **These photo videos have become treasured keepsakes for our community, allowing us to look back on important moments with joy and gratitude, motivating my sisters to want to learn how to create, thus allowing me to mentor my sisters on the same PowerPoint.**

Publisher opened a new creative door for me, which I am using to reduce the community expenses. For example, after learning how to design professional-looking documents and layouts, I made a booklet for the Solemnity of St. Dominic, ensuring that the celebration was marked with a beautiful and well-organized program. I also created a pamphlet for our community, and some calendars which help us share who we are and further promote our work. **The ability to combine text, images, and color into a clear, attractive design has made our printed materials more appealing and effective.**

Excel was a different kind of challenge, more about organization and accuracy. I learned how to create spreadsheets for recording and calculating data, which is essential for planning and record-keeping. **From simple tables to more detailed data analysis, I have seen how Excel can save time, reduce errors, and make my responsibilities as federal financial administrator more efficient.**

In short, what I learned in basic technology has been a gift not only to me but also to my sisters in my congregation, our community, and the people we serve. It has improved our communication, preserved our history, and strengthened the image we present to the world. This is why I am truly grateful for this training—it is a blessing that continues to bear fruit in many lives.



Sisters celebrate receiving laptops as part of their SLDI Basic Technology Workshop.

Catholic Sisters in Legal Ministry

By Tara Lopatofsky, PhD, CCLS, ASEC Senior Program Manager, M & E

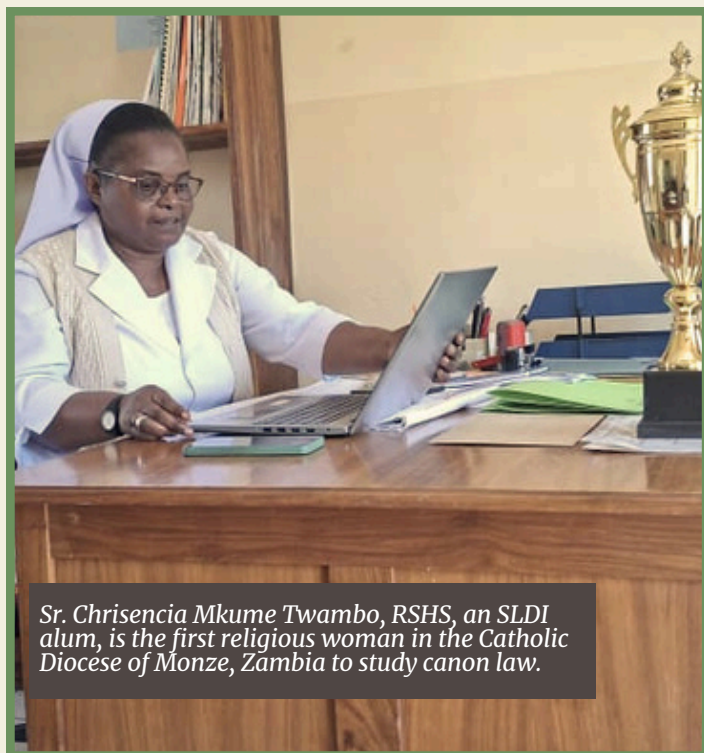
Former United States Supreme Court Justice and women's rights advocate Ruth Bader Ginsburg once said,

"Women belong in all places where decisions are being made."

Justice Ginsburg firmly believed that women provide vital contributions in all academic and professional fields, none more so than that of the law.

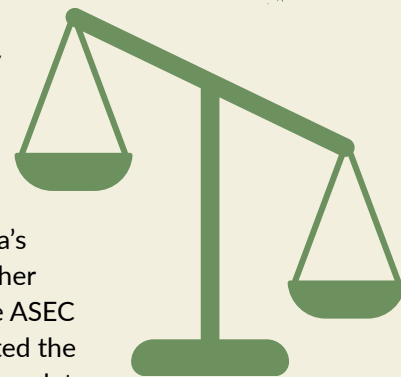
Globally, there has been a rise in the number of women lawyers and appointed heads of judiciaries. This stems from a growing perspective that diversity in the legal profession is key to improving every justice system.

Catholic sisters can and do serve as lawyers. Since 2015, **ASEC has supported 26 sisters in achieving educational credentials in the faculty of law**—22 through HESA and 4 via the Scholarship Program. Of these sisters, 6 have studied at the masters level (4 canon law and 2 law), 13 at the bachelor's level (11 law and 2 civil law), 6 at the diploma level (5 law and 1 civil law), and 2 at the certificate level (2 law). To date, 17 of these sisters have graduated with their certificates, diplomas, and/or degrees and are now serving in ministries related to their area of study.



Sr. Chrisencia Mkume Twambo, RSHS, an SLDI alum, is the first religious woman in the Catholic Diocese of Monze, Zambia to study canon law.

Sr. Idda Emmanuel Mfoi of the Sisters of Our Lady of Kilimanjaro (CDNK) in Tanzania was the first sister to be supported by ASEC to study law in 2015. Sr. Idda's successful completion of her Diploma in Law under the ASEC Scholarship Program piloted the way for other sisters to complete similar degrees. Sr. Idda is now an Assistant Lecturer of Law at HESA partner institution Mwenge Catholic University. She reports that her participation in the ASEC Scholarship Program provided the bridge she needed to continue her education.



Serving alongside Sr. Idda at Mwenge Catholic University is Sr. Petronila Cosmas Chuma of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters (CICM), who is also an Assistant Lecturer of Law. Sr. Petronila graduated from ASEC's Scholarship Program at the Form V and VI levels in 2016 from Bigwa Secondary School. She then went on to complete the HESA program, earning a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) from Saint Augustine University in 2021. She also earned a Master of Laws, specializing in land conveyance and economics, which are the areas she teaches in today. Sr. Petronila now dreams of earning a PhD in Law. It is with the dedication of women like Sr. Idda and Sr. Petronila to prepare highly ethical lawyers that challenges to the rule of law and corruption will be overcome.

Sr. Sabina Benedict Awutu Gadiye of the Servants of the Good News Sisters (SGN) serves as a lawyer at the Bethania Catechetical Centre in Manyara, Tanzania. Sr. Sabina is a three-time graduate of ASEC programs—earning a Certificate in Law in 2020 from the ASEC Scholarship Program, a Diploma in Law in 2023, and is currently enrolled in a Bachelor's Degree in Civil Law program as part of HESA

Sr. Sabina reports using the knowledge and skills she gained from the Scholarship and HESA programs to aid the Gorowa Tribe in Dodoma, Tanzania. She stated that,

“According to their culture and customs women were working in various areas like farming, keeping animals, nursing children, and housekeeping. However, they were neglected in possessing lands inherent; inheritance passed only through male lineage, and it was customary that girls should belong to their husband’s clan once married.”

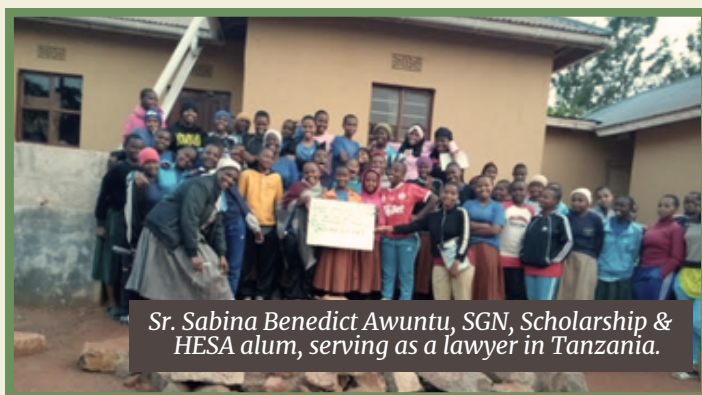
To address this issue, Sr. Sabina initiated a program to enlighten them on the law that guaranteed equality in land ownership. In accordance with section 3(20) of the Land Act of 1999 in Tanzania, Sr. Sabina advocated that “the right of every woman to acquire, hold, use, and deal with land shall be on the same basis and conditions as men” and section 20(1), which prohibits discrimination in land, especially by family or custom.

Sr. Sabina feels that, “In a world marked by legal complexities, particularly around issues such as human rights, family justice, and Church governance, sisters with legal training can offer both spiritual sensitivity and competence. A law degree allows sisters to bring the voice of the gospel into the secular legal system, while also helping the Church remain faithful to its mission of justice and integrity. Knowledge empowers us to uphold the dignity of the person, protect the vulnerable.”

Sr. Idda, Sr. Petronila, and Sr. Sabina are just three examples of Catholic sisters utilizing law

degrees to assist their communities. ASEC is proud to support these strong women who,

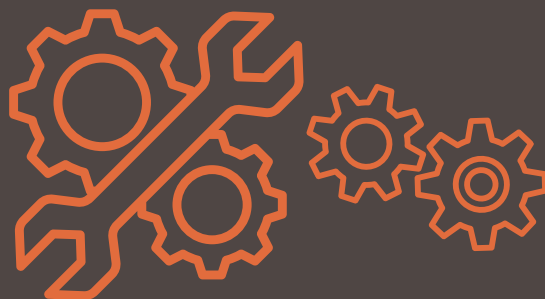
given their education and training, have the potential to advocate for justice, drive social change, influence public policy, and empower individuals and communities most in need. Catholic sisters have important perspectives and can make a difference in interpreting the rule of law for the Church and society.



Sr. Wirba Breaks New Ground in Civil Engineering

Sr. Wirba Blandine Kinyuy, SSA, a beneficiary of the ASEC Scholarship Program, recently completed her academic defense as a civil engineering technology student at the National Polytechnic University Institute in Cameroon. She is the first Cameroonian and the first ASEC-supported sister in Africa to earn this distinction.

Her achievement marks a significant milestone, not only for her congregation and community, but also for the broader effort to empower African sisters to pursue impactful careers in a wide range of fields.



Mission Advancement

Advancing ASEC's Mission

By Jake Danna Stevens, ASEC Media & Communications Manager, MA



Around the world, ASEC's mission is alive and visible. "Igniting Hope, Building Bridges, Creating Impact" is more than a slogan, it is the result for which ASEC strives. The results can be measured in data and by lives transformed. Across continents, these results are reflected in the celebrations, trainings, and programs that help lift up all who benefit from ASEC.

In December, ASEC honored its Founding Mothers during its gala at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia. The Silver Jubilee wasn't a finale, it was a launch pad for the next chapter of the mission: The next 25 years and beyond.

The new year kick off in Tanzania with a celebration honoring a new cohort of sisters trained in advanced web design, administration, or finance, ready to sustain ministries in Africa. Anniversary celebrations stretched over summer and fall in Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia, Malawi, Uganda, Lesotho, Kenya, and South Sudan. These events were more than ceremonies, they were proof that Catholic sisters are being prepared to fill critical gaps in healthcare, education, and social services, often in impoverished communities where no one else steps in. While events included ASEC staff and special guests, the focus always remained on the sisters and the care they provide their beneficiaries.



SLDI Graduation in Cameroon

In Uganda, the SLDI Executive Secretaries Workshop brought our sisters in from all 11 countries. Together they shared strategies, while alumnae and beneficiaries told raw, personal stories of the impact ASEC has had in their lives. In the spring, ASEC hosted its Board of Directors, Advisory Board, and the public for a Night of Storytelling that gave supporters a chance to put faces and voices to the mission.

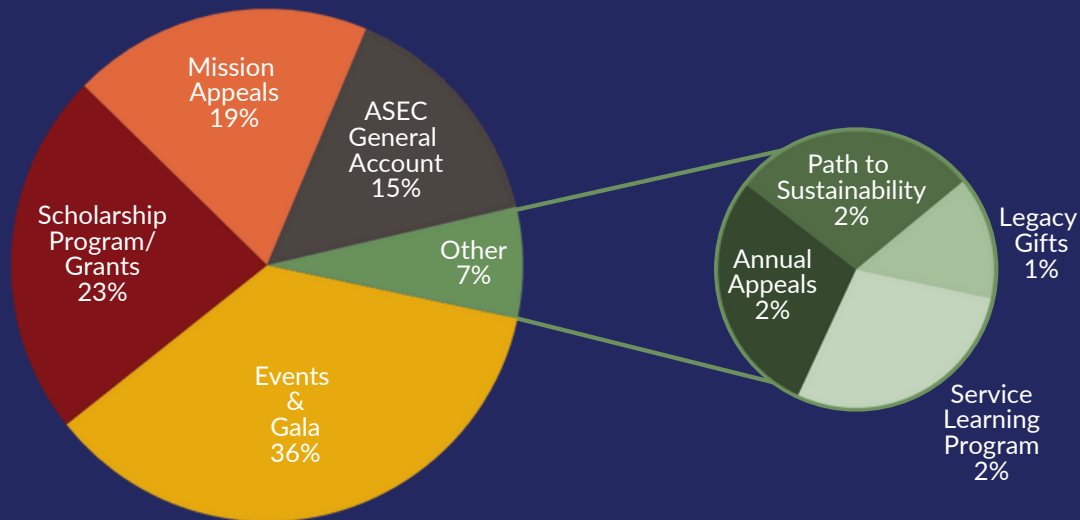
Service Learning trips from Marywood University and Chestnut Hill College brought students to African communities, while African staff toured the United States from Maine to California. This cross-cultural exchange offered students and sisters a firsthand experience in providing service in a different country. Their travels gave them the opportunity to reach out in support of ASEC.

The first 25 years of ASEC have proven that Catholic sisters can be lifted up with education; the next 25 are about ensuring that no one gets left behind. The mission isn't static; it's dynamic and expanding. ASEC isn't just advancing its mission; it's advancing the awareness of the hope ASEC-supported sisters bring to the world. ASEC is doing its part. **What can you do to help advance ASEC's mission?**

Left to Right: Staff members cut cake in celebration of their service to ASEC for over 10 years; Sr. Verla Elbira, SST, teaches in Cameroon; Service Learning participant Madilyn Grose visits Cottolengo Home in Kenya.



Mission Advancement Efforts 2024-2025



Path to Sustainability Events



US Staff members Maureen Elliott (center) and Isabelle Henry (right) talk with a Marywood University student.



From left Sr. Lina Wanjiku Ndugn'u, SE, Sr. Clarisse Remjika Jaiwo, SST, and Sr. Nancy Kamau, LSOF, represent ASEC at LCWR.



Tanzania



Cameroon



Ghana



Nigeria



Zambia

Celebrating 25 Years of Impact:

ASEC's Silver Jubilee Across Two Continents



By Megan Wescott, BBA, ASEC Digital & Social Media Specialist, MA

ASEC celebrated its 25th anniversary across Africa and in the United States under the Jubilee slogan “Igniting Hope, Building Bridges, Creating Impact.” The milestone year was marked by gatherings, graduations, and a gala that reflected ASEC’s global mission and vision.

Jubilee Joy Across Africa

Celebrations spanned ASEC’s partner countries, with SLDI graduations taking center stage. Graduations throughout 2024 honored sisters who completed training in finance, administration, and advanced web design, fields critical to sustaining ministries and serving communities.

The first celebration was held in January 2024 at the Holistic Education Centre in Morogoro, Tanzania, where two of ASEC’s U.S. staff members, Nicole Vilogi-DiPietro and Rosemary Shaver, joined Sr. Draru Mary Cecilia, LSMIG, to witness the festivities. This event reflected ASEC’s journey and strengthened partnerships supporting sisters’ education across the region.

Late summer and early fall marked a busy season of SLDI graduations across several countries. In August, Cameroon, Ghana, and Nigeria all hosted vibrant celebrations. Cameroon’s colorful event featured a jubilee cake-cutting ceremony that brought together bishops, ASEC leaders, and program facilitators joined by U.S. staff members Rosemary Shaver and Sneh Akruvala.

On the same day, Ghana honored its SLDI graduates in a celebration reflecting ASEC’s commitment to forming leaders who transform, while Nigeria’s event united sisters and partners to recognize their growth in leadership and administration. Sr. Barbara Spears, SNJM, outgoing chair of the ASEC Board of Directors, joined in prayer and congratulated graduates for their dedication to service.

In September, the celebrations continued with Zambia's SLDI graduation, attended by Board Member Sr. Rosalia Sakayombo, SHS, who emphasized the graduates' responsibility to apply their training for the greater good of their communities. In attendance at Malawi's celebration was ASEC Board Member Brigid Blake, who congratulated graduates for using their new knowledge from SLDI to implement projects across their country. Lesotho's graduation brought sisters from across the region together, now better equipped to lead in education, healthcare, and social development, and was attended by ASEC staff members Sr. Lina Wanjiku Ndugu'u, SE, and Sr. Clarisse Remjika Jaiwo, SST. Uganda's ceremony was both a graduation and a moment of growing solidarity, and Brigid Blake joined in recognizing the graduates' accomplishments. South Sudan's graduation at the beginning of October marked the close of the early fall season, praising graduates who are leading with renewed confidence and skills. The event was attended by Sr. Lina and Sr. Clarisse, along with the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Séamus Patrick Horgan, who served as the presider and guest of honor.

The winter months marked the final celebrations of the anniversary year. In December, Kenya hosted the last SLDI graduation ceremony, attended by ASEC Executive Director Sr. Draru Mary Cecilia, LSMIG; Board Member Mary Gautier; Mission Advancement Director Sr. Nancy Kamau, LSOSF; Conrad N. Hilton Foundation Staff members Sr. Jane Agnes Njeri and Sr. Jane Wakahiu, LSOSF; and partners.

A Grand Finale in the United States

The highlight of the jubilee year came in December, when ASEC hosted its first-ever Gala at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia, PA. This elegant evening brought together friends, partners, and supporters under the theme *"Igniting Hope, Building Bridges, Creating Impact."* Guests celebrated ASEC's accomplishments; honored Founding Mothers, Sr. Anne Munley, IHM; Sr. Carol Jean Vale, SSJ; and Sr. Mary Reap, IHM; and renewed commitments to support education for Catholic sisters in Africa. The gala not only commemorated 25 years of service but also launched a future-oriented vision: to broaden ASEC's reach and deepen its impact for generations to come.

From the first gathering in Morogoro to the gala in Philadelphia, ASEC's Silver Jubilee celebrations affirmed a global community committed to educating and accompanying Catholic sisters for transformative ministry.



SOWING SEEDS OF

Hope is not simple optimism but a firm belief that God will provide. To hope is to be courageous, to persevere through life's challenges, and to live a life of charity. ASEC's program participants and alumni recognize the divine gift that is hope. Below are some of their own encounters with instilling hope and promoting this theological virtue.

hope

By sharing **the message of hope, love, and redemption found in Christ** I have been able to make a positive difference in the lives of others and bring about transformation and healing in the world around me.
-SLDI Alum, Lesotho

The achievements may not have been recognized nationally but...I have been able to improve the life of my patients and have been able to **give them hope**.
-HESA Alum, Kenya

I have been an **agent of hope** to those who come. Other's have found courage in encountering me and feel strengthened.
-SLDI Alum, Malawi

Bringing hope to the people and joy in my congregation and community as I live out the charism of the congregation through my ministry.
-SLDI Alum, Cameroon

They helped my view in life change, doing things with love is the best way to do something in this world ... having the opportunity to participate in that, to not only give them a hot meal, but to make them smile and **give them hope for the future** warmed my heart.
-Service Learning Alum, Kenya

ASEC [should] continue the good work they are doing in the lives of religious women in Africa, **giving hope to the hopeless**.
-HESA Student, Ghana

My ministry has inspired faith, supported youth, and **brought unity and hope** to the community.
-Scholarship Alum, Tanzania

Ripple Effect of ASEC

By **Isabelle Henry**, ASEC Program Coordinator, Programs & **Jake Danna Stevens**, ASEC Media & Communications Manager, MA

She sits in a classroom, her book open and her mind ready. The lesson she learns today will not stay within those walls. Her knowledge and skill will touch her community, her country, and even the world. For more than 25 years, ASEC has educated over 11,000 Catholic Sisters in Africa, whose service to others has created a ripple effect that ignites hope and encourages people to dream while experiencing a better reality. Graduating from ASEC's programs is more than a personal milestone, it is the start of an ever expanding impact.

Take Sr. Lydiah Shiroti, SMK, who earned a Bachelor's Degree in Education through ASEC's HESA program. Today, she shapes young minds as a Primary School teacher in her community. In Malawi, Sr. Maureen J. Chalamanda, SOL, applies the skills she gained through ASEC to provide emergency care for expectant mothers, helping lower maternal mortality in her rural community. Each of these sisters turns education into action, extending their reach far beyond the classroom or clinic.

Sr. Agness Kachali, SHR, inspires environmental change in her Secondary School classroom. Her students plant trees across Malawi to combat deforestation, demonstrating that lessons in the classroom can grow into real-world transformation. Just as the seeds her students sow will one day flourish, the impact of ASEC graduates continues to multiply, touching countless lives across Africa.

ASEC's influence goes beyond sisters alone. Through ASEC's Service Learning Program, students and mentors from Marywood University and Chestnut Hill College travel to Africa to engage in hands-on service and cultural exchange. In 2025, participants served at the Dorothea Rescue Center in Kenya, directed by Sr. Caroline Ngati, ASE. The center has become a thriving sanctuary and home for young girls from the street, complete with a school and health center. Sr. Caroline's leadership and collaboration with ASEC service learning participants reflect the program's mission to build relationships that inspire hope and service across cultures.

The stories of Sr. Lydiah, Sr. Maureen, Sr. Agness, and Isabella show how education becomes a ripple effect of hope and service. Every student taught, every patient cared for, every tree planted, and every life touched is part of a chain reaction that grows stronger with each act of service. It begins with one sister, and her service becomes limitless.

ASEC extends its sincere gratitude to the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation for its continued partnership and belief in the mission of empowering Catholic sisters across Africa.



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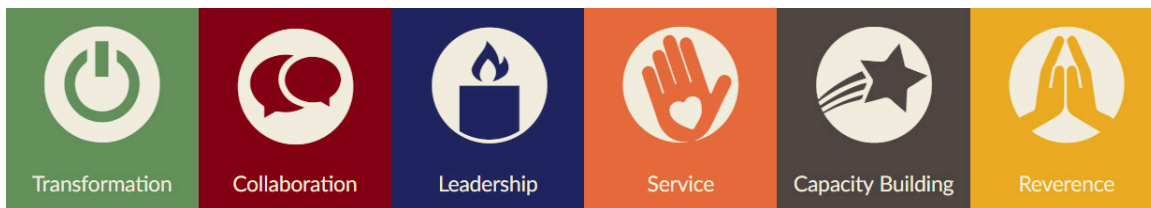
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News & Updates

Thank You For Your Service

With sincere appreciation to those whose time of service with ASEC has come to a close. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you:

- Sr. Florence Hee, OSF, Board of Directors
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- Kevin Reynolds, PhD, Thomas More University, Board of Directors
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- Sr. Maria Ndeshiniyo Temu, MCEM, Director, Tanzania
- Betsy Hartshorn, CPA, Finance Manager, Administration, United States
- Mary Roche, Administrative Specialist, Administration, United States

ASEC is proud to recognize our Executive Director, Sr. Draru Mary Cecilia, LSMIG, for her remarkable leadership and dedication to empowering women religious across Africa. She received the 2024 Notre Dame Award for Outstanding Contributions to Catholic Education presented by the University of Notre Dame and she was honored with the A Champion Who Cares award from Women on the World stage (W.O.W.) during the Global Black Women's Chamber of Commerce 10th Annual Trailblazers & Unsung Heroes Awards Gala.



Welcome to the Team

ASEC is thrilled to welcome new members to the team this year:

- Sr. Mary E. Bendyna, OP, PhD, Board of Directors
- Deborah Newhouse Dunham, Board of Directors
- Katherine Stevick, Board of Directors
- Renee G. Zehel, PhD, Board of Directors
- Marie Scheetz, BS, Advisory Board
- Sr. Gudelia Msuya, LSOSF, Country Director, Tanzania
- Sr. Rustica Pius Kayombo, OSB, Program Coordinator, Tanzania
- Sr. Mercy Machona, CMFC, Program Coordinator, Zimbabwe

We are grateful to Sr. Barbara Spears, SNJM, outgoing ASEC Board Chair for her dedicated leadership and service.



On the Cover: Ignitor of Hope

"Hope came when I least expected it through ASEC," said Sr. Grace Akunna John-Emezi, HHCJ, a HESA participant and graduate from Catholic University of Ghana. Sr. Grace has become a true *Hope Igniter*, she made history as the first woman religious elected Faculty Student President, gaining skills to lead, train healthcare workers, and manage projects with compassion. Today, she organizes community health education, hosted in local languages, mentors young sisters, promotes breast cancer awareness, and strengthens rural healthcare. She has personally donated blood to save the lives of mothers during childbirth. Sr. Grace exemplifies the kind of leader ASEC hopes to cultivate, showing how education can facilitate service and hope for others.



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Our Mission

The African Sisters Education Collaborative educates Catholic women religious in Africa to strengthen their leadership capacity to provide services that address local and global challenges.

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Vision

ASEC is an organization with a proven capacity to strengthen, through education and empowerment, the unique potential of Catholic women religious in Africa to fulfill Christ's mission, effectively promoting human development, spiritual growth, and transformation of the lives of the people they joyfully serve in accordance with the charisms of their institutes and the needs of their ministries.

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