

December 2021

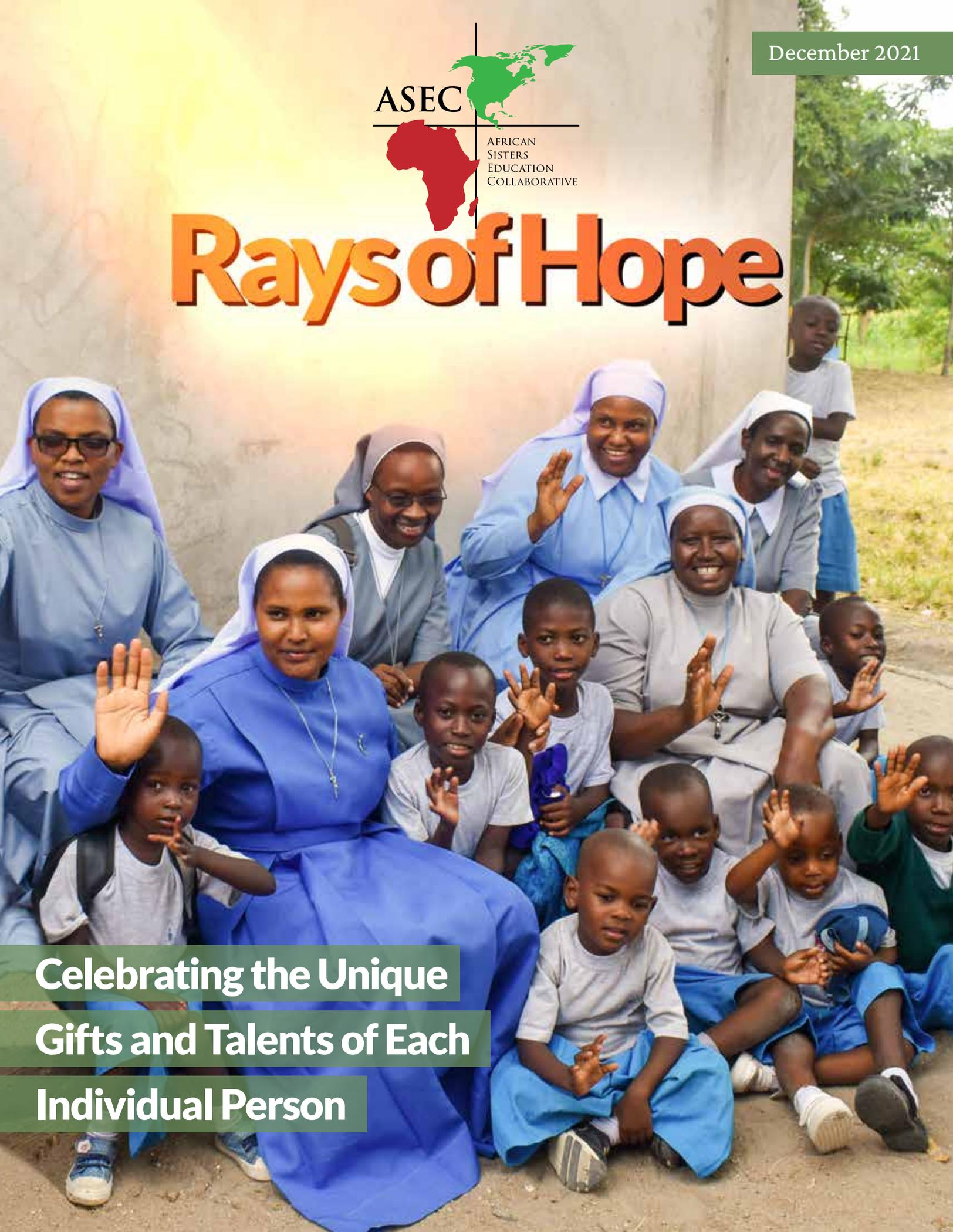
ASEC



AFRICAN  
SISTERS  
EDUCATION  
COLLABORATIVE

# Rays of Hope

**Celebrating the Unique  
Gifts and Talents of Each  
Individual Person**



From the Executive Director's Desk

# Reverence As Our North Star

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

Welcome to the Rays of Hope edition 2021. In this edition the theme of *Reverence* is explicated from diverse perspectives by the different authors of articles.

A core value of the African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC) is reverence, which highlights that:

*ASEC respects the special value, unique talents and gifts of each person created and sustained by God. To revere life, is to act and respond with deep respect and compassion for the dignity and diversity inherent in humanity. ASEC extends services across multiple cultures and communities, to the global north and south, operating with an appreciation for the uniqueness of people and their worldviews; and with empathy by listening, reflecting and promoting communication that is meaningful, honest and inclusive.*

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the call “**we are at this together**” sounded almost contradictory to the call for social distancing, masking up and sanitizing. Social distancing drove us to create, curve and protect a space that we called our own. At the same time, we became more conscious and respectful

of the social space of each other for health and safety reasons.

On a recent flight, as we boarded and took our assigned seats in the aircraft, the steward constantly reminded us to “**be kind to one another.**” This reminder appeared to suggest to me that shared space slipped from our memory so quickly! We needed a reminder to re-enter and share public space again after several months of social distancing. Literally, during the flight the steward encouraged us to learn again to reach out in kindness across our social boundaries and, in deep reverence, welcome other travelers to share our social space. Therefore, reverence is suggested as the North Star that guides us to re-learn how to share our private and public spaces again.

In the challenging years of 2020/21, I am delighted to inform you that the value of reverence enabled us to stretch our imagination and creativity to keep ASEC's programs afloat and running online in spite of poor electricity and internet infrastructure in Africa. The Catholic sisters in Africa continue to be strengthened as they courageously tackle difficult situations and offer essential services to the people in Africa.

ASEC has also experienced institutional growth. **Associate Memberships have increased from the original 4 to 7** and this number will continue to grow. I am delighted to inform you that about **2,000 sisters from diverse congregations and countries remained enrolled** in ASEC's three major educational programs across Africa.

You have been an important part of ASEC's success story and development. In the spirit of reverence, I acknowledge and appreciate your partnership and collaboration that has sustained ASEC's mission, especially during these challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the year ahead, may reverence be the North Star that guides you and your loved ones into good health and safety. ✨



## ASEC Programs

Our fight against extreme poverty happens in the **most vulnerable communities across Africa**. Sisters serve in areas that are geographically difficult to reach, lack adequate infrastructure and suffer from harsh climates, war, natural disasters, disease and violence. Catholic sisters courageously **seek out the overlooked and advocate for the underserved**. They are called to go to the hard places. We are called to give them the tools to make a bigger impact.

Programs of African Sisters Education Collaborative, or ASEC (AYE-sek), are always evolving; **molding to fit the specific needs of sisters** serving in the rural and poor communities of sub-Saharan Africa.

### Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI)\*

SLDI (ES-elle-dee-eye) 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 (HESS-uh) 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 U.S. Since 2013.

### The Scholarship Program

The Scholarship Program bridges the gap to higher education for sisters by providing two-year scholarships to complete secondary school or higher education credentials relevant to their ministries. Many of our scholarship recipients continue their education through ASEC's HESA program. Since 2012.

### Service Learning

Students and sisters from ASEC founding 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.

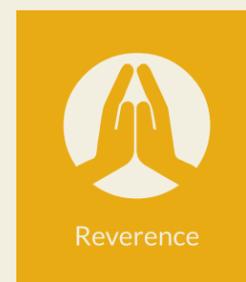
### Research Initiative\*

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

### Institutional Capacity Building (ICB)\*

Housed under SLDI, ICB (EYE-see-bee) supports the internal strength and the external service of national conferences/associations and congregations in Africa as they strive to positively impact human development. The goal of ICB is to strengthen systems and improve the vitality and vibrancy of African women religious. Since 2019.

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



## rev•er•ence

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

ASEC respects the special value, unique talents and gifts of each person created and sustained by God. To revere life, is to act and respond with deep respect and compassion for the dignity and diversity inherent in humanity. ASEC extends services across multiple cultures and communities, to the global north and south, operating with an appreciation for the uniqueness of people and their worldviews; and with empathy by listening, reflecting and promoting communication that is meaningful, honest and inclusive.

# Spotlight on Where We Work

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**CAMEROON:** The instability in war-torn Cameroon created serious financial problems for the Sisters of St. Therese, who provide rehabilitation services and therapy for children and adults with physical and neurological disabilities. But **Sr. Leonarda Ngoin Tubuo, SST**, was able to use what she learned in SLDI to start a sustainable farm that supplements the rehab center's income so they can continue to provide services to those in need. Sr. Leonarda then shared her project details with current SLDI participants during a "virtual field trip" experience.



**605**

**NIGERIA:** Five HESA-sponsored sisters received **Head of Department awards** for their outstanding academic performance at the 2021 Veritas University, Nigeria, graduation ceremony.



**511**

**GHANA:** HESA-sponsored sister **Sr. Gifty Anastasia Blewu, SMMC**, graduated top of class at the Catholic University College of Ghana (CUCG). This marks the third consecutive year that a HESA-sponsored sister was the top graduating student at CUCG.



**458**

**ZAMBIA:** SLDI alumna **Sr. Memory Zingwaya, RSHS**, acquired funds to purchase 4 incubators for Monze Mission Hospital in Zambia. The hospital only had one incubator and when it stopped working, the maternity ward unable to accommodate the number of premature babies needing care. Her efforts resulted in a total of 7 incubators purchased for the hospital.



**72**

**LESOTHO:** As Administrator of Mazenod Girls High School in Maseru, **Sr. Augustina Thokoa, SNJM**, is using what she's learned in SLDI to improve conditions for both students and staff. Some of her accomplishments include: developing a new financial plan, increasing enrollment, installing a solar power system, upgrading the girls' dormitories and acquiring 70 computers for the technology lab.



**76**

**SOUTH SUDAN:** SLDI Alumna & HESA Participant **Sr. Mary Faida, SHS**, noticed how difficult it was for her neighbors to obtain healthy food during the lockdown in South Sudan. So, she and other sisters taught the community how to plant vegetables using sacks and broken buckets on their verandas.



**684**

**UGANDA:** As Head Teacher, **Sr. Betty Namatovu, IMHR**, is using her HESA-sponsored education to improve conditions at St. Matia Primary School in rural Uganda. She's renovated much of the property, installed fences and electricity, restored clean water and even planted vegetable crops for students and staff to access on school grounds.



**1,139**

**KENYA:** A sponsorship program for children's education was initiated by SLDI alumna **Sr. Lucy Kanjira, RGS**. Her project addresses a number of needs within her community such as educating the youth, empowering parents, improving food accessibility, reducing malnutrition and providing life-altering empowerment for women and young girls.



**968**

**TANZANIA:** On April 26, 2021, 22 ASEC scholarship recipients graduated from Bigwa Sisters Secondary School in Morogoro. One former Bigwa graduate, **Sr. Magreth John Gabriel, SOLQA**, achieved Division II results on her national exams. She has since been accepted to continue her education at the Institute of Rural Development Planning through the University of Dodoma, to assist her congregation in developing its rural ministries.



**336**

**MALAWI:** SLDI alumna **Sr. Amelia Nyendwa, TS**, is using her new skills to coordinate COVID-19 food relief for local widows. The beneficiaries expressed their gratitude, as the maize meals will help to improve their nutrition and well-being. Widows in Africa already face challenges getting food and basic necessities and this has been exacerbated by the pandemic as prices continue to rise.



= Total Served by ASEC in-country as of March, 2021.

# Called Back To Reverence

By Sr. Patricia M. Bombard, BVM, D.Min., ASEC Advisory Board Member

One day, years ago now, a very important insight came to me as I sat on a bus making its way down State Street in downtown Chicago, IL. I was seated next to a window and as I looked out on the street crowded with cars, taxis and buses all packed in between the rows of tall buildings that hid the sky, something prompted me to throw out a silent question: “How did our world get into the mess we are in?” I followed this with another: “What have we lost that we need so desperately to get back if we are going to provide a future for coming generations?”

I wasn't really expecting to get an answer to my silent questions—not on the bus, anyway. I was just doing something I do often: pondering. So, for a quiet moment, I just sat there, leaving the questions hanging in the space between the window and the world. Then, quite unexpectedly and from deep within the stillness of my mind, came a surprising reply in a single word: reverence. In the moment, I realized I wasn't sure what the word meant—or, more precisely, what was being called for within the sense of the word.

Shortly thereafter, as these things sometimes go for me, I was in the library using an encyclopedia to look up some information I needed. As I paged through the book, I stumbled on a photograph of Albert Schweitzer. It was a name I had heard, but I knew very little about him at the time except that he had been a doctor and founded a hospital in Africa. I started to read the caption beneath his photograph and was stunned to learn that in the early part of

the twentieth century, Schweitzer formulated his own philosophy, which he called “Reverence for Life.” Seeing again that word reverence brought me right back to my own experience on the bus a few days earlier. I paused my research to read the full article on Schweitzer.

I learned that **Schweitzer had formulated his philosophy after an experience he had on a small steamer moving slowly up a river in Africa.** As he stood at the rail of the steamer, looking out over the river, the boat passed a herd of hippopotamuses lounging in the water. Drawn in by the beauty and tranquility of the scene, Schweitzer pondered a question that had puzzled him for years: “What is the most valid basis for ethics?” As he stood there, a reply to his question emerged. He later wrote:

**“There flashed upon my mind, unforeseen and unsought, the phrase, ‘Reverence for Life.’”**

After reading this description, I closed the book, marveling at the resonance of our reflective experiences. I thought, “Is this just Albert and me, or is there something more going on here?”

In the months that followed, as I moved into reading more articles and books on the relationship between spirituality and the ecological crisis, I discovered that many more people have come to the same conclusion about reclaiming reverence. Yet the question remains, how do we do this?

## Becoming Reverent

Cultivating reverence is an inner journey of growth. It involves **a growing awareness that who you are as a human being is a story of relationships.** It involves recognizing and accepting that you are interdependent and, from within that realization, learning to develop within yourself an attitude of reverence.

Reverence, to my mind, includes a respect for the limitations and gifts that each living being, each plant, each rock—even each mosquito—has to offer through its own unique miracle of existence.

**Reverence begins with the growing awareness that all life is interconnected. In other words, it demands a dramatic shift in worldview from individualism to community.**

Cultivating reverence continues with an in-the-moment conviction that each and every creature has an inherent right to existence. That awareness leads me to pause to observe my own behaviors as I interact with other beings—whether it be an insect or another human. I can act now with an awareness that each one of us, no matter how humble or grand, is somehow held within the unity of the whole. ☸

ASEC's Research Initiative

# Catholic Sisters: Critical Investigators and Capable Researchers for Africa

By Tara Lopatofsky, Ph.D., CCLS, ASEC Senior Program Manager, Monitoring & Evaluation

**A**SEC's Research Initiative aims to promote research on Catholic sisters in Africa. The Initiative is designed to 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.

Through the Initiative, ASEC strives to increase the academic literature available on Catholic women religious in Africa and develop sisters as critical investigators. Equipped with investigative skills, sisters will be capable of conducting rigorous research that will strengthen the capacity of their congregations and positively impact human development.

## Academic Publication & Research-Related Webinars

In 2021, the ASEC Research Initiative saw **tremendous growth in the areas of academic publication and research-related webinars.** The Initiative focused its efforts on conducting research related to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact in ASEC's 10 African countries of operation. This research has provided critical insight into how to best support ASEC's beneficiaries and stakeholders through this unprecedented time.

In total, **four ASEC-related research articles were published in academic journals, five are currently under peer review and two are in development.**

## Visiting Scholar Fellowship

ASEC continues to strengthen its partnership with the **Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA)** at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, through the implementation of the **Visiting Scholar Fellowship** and the hosting of a virtual webinar on the integration of charism, spirituality, mission and ministry.



The 7th visiting scholar, **Sr. Lucy Dora Akello, LSMIG**, was selected from Uganda and is currently studying

remotely with researchers at CARA due to travel restrictions. ASEC is currently in the process of selecting an 8th visiting sister scholar from Ghana.

## Raising Awareness

The Initiative has made strides in developing additional connections with institutions and research partners with similar objectives. By participating in events such as **Marywood University's Virtual Research Day**, we are able to bring awareness to ASEC's Research Initiative.

## Central Repository of Data

Further, ASEC has advanced the integration of its **organization-wide customized database**, which will be greatly beneficial in future research projects and help pique interest in ASEC-related research opportunities going forward.

You can learn more about ASEC's Research Initiative at [asec-sldi.org/research](https://asec-sldi.org/research). ☸

## Frequently Asked Questions About Catholic Sisters

Here are some commonly asked questions about Catholic sisters.

### Are Catholic sisters highly educated?

Every congregation understands the importance of education in living out its charism. Catholic sisters in the U.S. are known to be highly educated. However, in Africa, about 71% of Catholic sisters do not have higher education credentials. Because of the great need for their service, sisters are often under qualified for the positions they hold (like teachers, nurses, bursars, etc.). This is why ASEC's mission is so important.

### Do sisters make money?

Catholic sisters dedicate their lives to service and take a vow of poverty. Many sisters in Africa serve in low or no paying jobs in very poor, rural areas. When a sister does earn a salary, the money goes directly to her religious community (which is financially separate from the Catholic church). Sisters are given a small stipend by their congregation to pay for personal items.

### Are sisters supported by the Catholic church?

Sisters are regulated by Church law/Canon law, but orders of sisters are not financially supported by the Catholic church as an institution. In fact, most Catholic organizations are financially separate from the Vatican. The money that you put in the collection basket during mass does not go to sisters, unless it's to pay the salary of a sister who serves in your parish.

### What's the difference between a sister and a nun?

Great question, see page 21 for the answer. ☸

\* References for this publication are available at [asec-sldi.org/rays21](https://asec-sldi.org/rays21).

# Sisters in Action

How sisters are using their ASEC-sponsored education to serve their communities.



Sr. Eveline Ambe Bi, SSA (left), is passionate about empowering women to contribute to peace building in war-torn Cameroon.



In Nigeria, Sr. GraceAnn Iguve, OP, is using her SLDI skills to educate the youth.



SLDI alumna Sr. Veronica Nkom, OLF, obtains mattresses and blankets for internally displaced families in Nigeria.



In East Cameroon, Sr. Yvette Sam, SUSC, used her SLDI skills to secure funding for a borehole and pump to provide potable water, improve sanitation and reduce water-related diseases like cholera and typhoid in her local neighborhood and school.



Two HESA sponsored sisters representing Catholic University College of Ghana place 3rd in National Nursing Competition.



In Tanzania, sisters attending the SLDI Finance Workshop take field trips to local projects run by ASEC alumnae, such as this farm.



In Nigeria, Sr. Veronica Nkom, OLF, put on a Career Day for students in the school where she serves. She says, "The SLDI training has sharpened my initiative and where there are resources we try to put into practice what we have learned. And we learn to improvise, also."



Sr. Caroline Munene, DSH, witnessed the devastating impact COVID-19 had on the local economy and how the loss of income left many in Kenya without food. Empowered by the SLDI program, she raised funds to purchase food and distributed it to families in need.



SLDI participant Sr. Judith Atukwatse, OLG, was inspired to start a vegetable and poultry project in her Ugandan community.



Poetry Book launch of *The Child is Black*, written by Poetry Volume 1, written by SLDI alumna Sr. Esther Koros, OSF, of Uganda.

# The Impact of Education

Statistics from educating Catholic sisters in 10 countries in sub-Saharan Africa show the incredible impact\* sisters are making on marginalized communities. Because of people like YOU, ASEC has served **over 5,300 sisters & stakeholders** with INCREDIBLE results such as...



**2.2 M+ Served**

ASEC alumnae have served over 2.2 million<sup>1</sup> people in poor, rural communities across Africa—where help is needed most.



**\$19.5 M+ Raised**

ASEC alumnae have raised over \$19.5 million<sup>1</sup> in funding for community sustainability and improvement projects.



**35,500+ Mentored**

ASEC alumnae have mentored more than 35,500 people,<sup>1</sup> sharing the skills they've learned through ASEC with others.

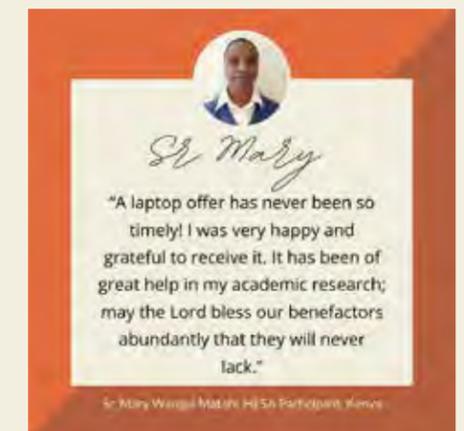
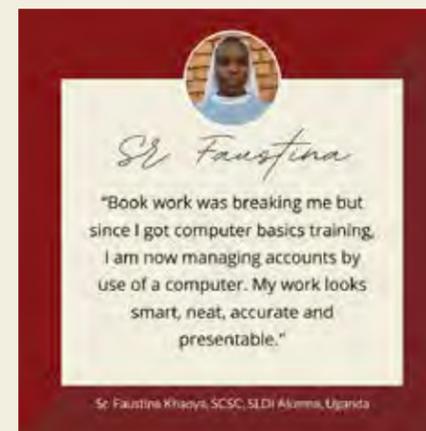
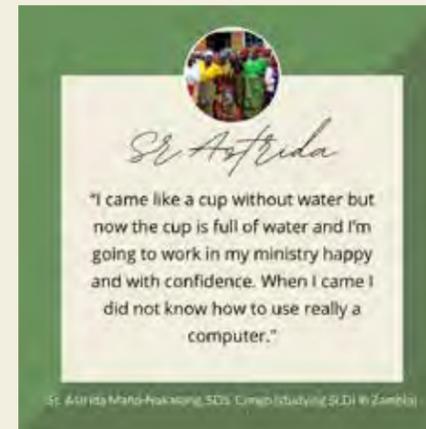


**3,800+ New Jobs**

Projects initiated by ASEC alumnae have created over 3,800 jobs<sup>1</sup> in under-served rural African communities.

# The Power of Technology

Empowering sisters to learn and use technology and providing sisters with access to computers are very important steps in achieving ASEC's mission. Laptops enable sisters to practice their skills, study for degrees and enhance their ministry work.



\* References for this publication are available at [asec-sldi.org/rays21](http://asec-sldi.org/rays21).

## 2021 Year in Review

# SLDI



### Over 4,600 Served

Since 2007, SLDI has served over 3,300 sisters\* and over 1,300 stakeholders\* in sub-Saharan Africa.



### More Confidence

80% of SLDI alumnae\* improved their self-perception and 44%\* pursue higher education after the program.



### Effective Use of Skills

Over 75% of SLDI alumnae\* use their skills effectively to benefit their ministries and congregations.



### Greater Impact

SLDI alumnae have secured \$19.5+ million\* for community projects, like building hospitals and improving schools.

## Sisters Leadership Development Initiative

By Jaime Lyn Bloxham, MPA, ASEC Program Manager, SLDI & Service Learning

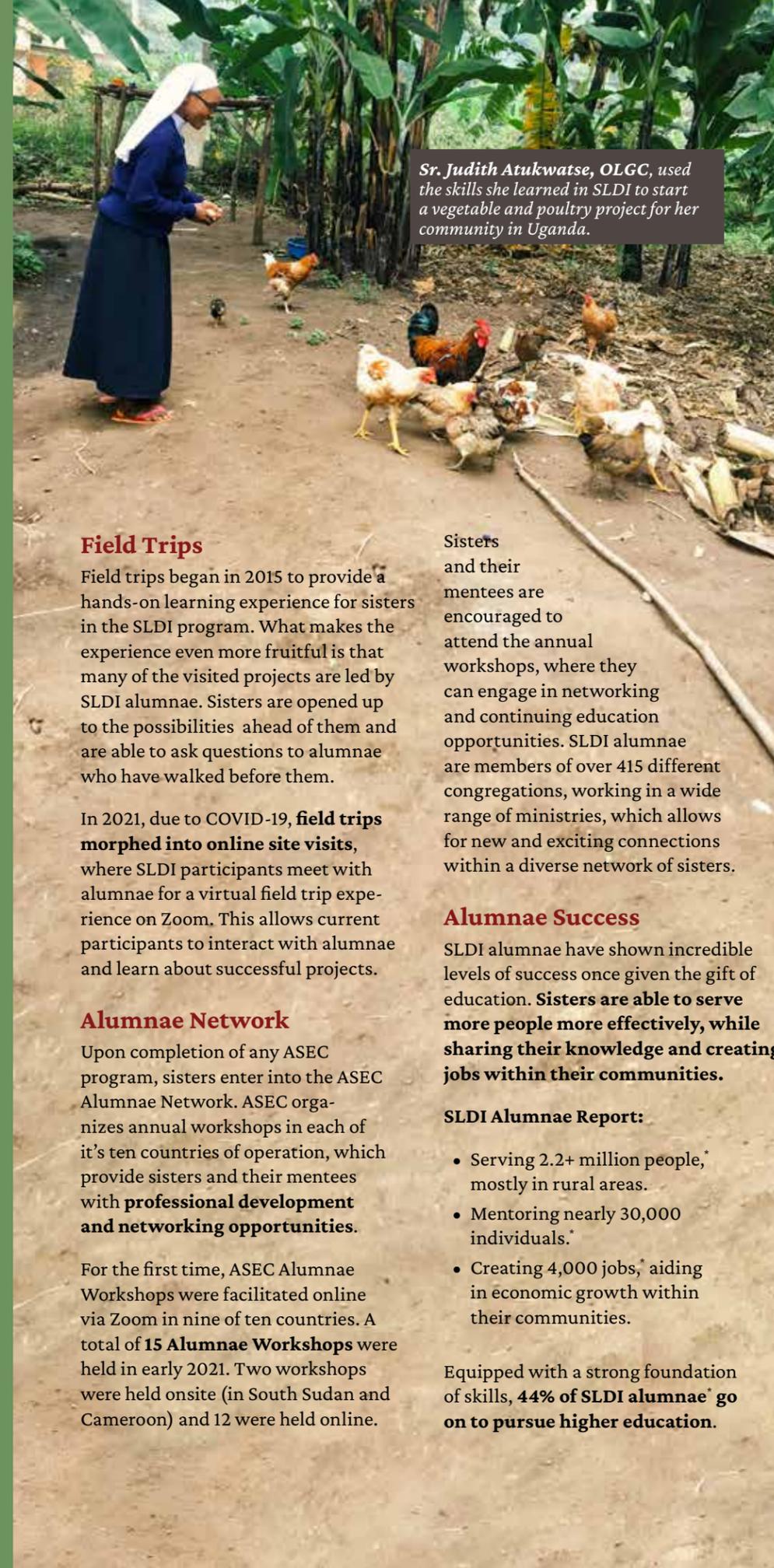
The Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI) program offers Catholic sisters in ten African countries the opportunity to enhance their leadership competencies and professional skills in the areas of administration, finance and technology. Funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the SLDI program collaborates with partner consultants, congregational superiors and national conferences/associations of women religious to develop and deliver the program, which is taught over a three-year period.

Since the program's inception in 2007, SLDI has empowered **over 3,310 unique sisters\*** to

become more effective in their congregations and apostolates. An additional **1,316 stakeholders\*** were served through other program activities, such as General Superior workshops, **totaling 4,626 individuals\* served by SLDI.**

Upon graduation from the program, sisters receive a laptop as a professional resource to build their technological capacity and increase the effectiveness of their work. Sisters also use the laptops to share what they learned with additional sisters, colleagues and others. Alumnae are expected to mentor at least 3 other sisters.

\* References for this publication are available at [asec-sldi.org/rays21](https://asec-sldi.org/rays21).



Sr. Judith Atukwatse, OLCG, used the skills she learned in SLDI to start a vegetable and poultry project for her community in Uganda.

### Field Trips

Field trips began in 2015 to provide a hands-on learning experience for sisters in the SLDI program. What makes the experience even more fruitful is that many of the visited projects are led by SLDI alumnae. Sisters are opened up to the possibilities ahead of them and are able to ask questions to alumnae who have walked before them.

In 2021, due to COVID-19, **field trips morphed into online site visits**, where SLDI participants meet with alumnae for a virtual field trip experience on Zoom. This allows current participants to interact with alumnae and learn about successful projects.

### Alumnae Network

Upon completion of any ASEC program, sisters enter into the ASEC Alumnae Network. ASEC organizes annual workshops in each of its ten countries of operation, which provide sisters and their mentees with **professional development and networking opportunities.**

For the first time, ASEC Alumnae Workshops were facilitated online via Zoom in nine of ten countries. A total of **15 Alumnae Workshops** were held in early 2021. Two workshops were held onsite (in South Sudan and Cameroon) and 12 were held online.

Sisters and their mentees are encouraged to attend the annual workshops, where they can engage in networking and continuing education opportunities. SLDI alumnae are members of over 415 different congregations, working in a wide range of ministries, which allows for new and exciting connections within a diverse network of sisters.

### Alumnae Success

SLDI alumnae have shown incredible levels of success once given the gift of education. **Sisters are able to serve more people more effectively, while sharing their knowledge and creating jobs within their communities.**

### SLDI Alumnae Report:

- Serving 2.2+ million people,\* mostly in rural areas.
- Mentoring nearly 30,000 individuals.\*
- Creating 4,000 jobs,\* aiding in economic growth within their communities.

Equipped with a strong foundation of skills, **44% of SLDI alumnae\* go on to pursue higher education.**



Sr. Astridah Banda, OP, live on the air.

### SLDI Alumna Uses Radio to Combat COVID-19 in Zambia

Sr. Astridah Banda, OP, is using the leadership skills she learned in ASEC's SLDI program to share critical health information about the pandemic. After completing a COVID-19 training sponsored by Alight and Sisters Rising Worldwide, she felt empowered to share what she had learned to prevent the spread of the virus.

So, she organized and produced the *COVID-19 Awareness Programme*, a live radio show where she broadcasts public health messages and pandemic guidelines to an estimated 1.5 million people,\* including underserved communities across Zambia. She invited other sisters on the show to translate information into several of the estimated 72 dialects\* spoken in the country.

### Bill Gates named Sr. Astridah one of seven "Unsung Heroes of the Pandemic."

Bill Gates recently featured Sr. Astridah in his popular *Gates Notes* newsletter and praised her work on FM 99.1 Yatsani Community Radio in Zambia.

Read more at [asec-sldi.org/banda](https://asec-sldi.org/banda).

\* References for this publication are available at [asec-sldi.org/rays21](https://asec-sldi.org/rays21).

# On the Other Side of Reverence

By Sr. Mary Persico, IHM, Ed.D., President, Marywood University; ASEC Board of Directors Founding Member



From Left to Right: 1- Handmaid Sisters, Prudence Libingu Lunsonga (left) and Alice Mary Light (right) attend the SLDI Finance Workshop in Zambia. 2- Participants of the Malawi Finance Workshop in group work. 3- Sisters pose for a photo at the SLDI Administration Workshop in Nigeria. 4- Learning how to use the computer lights up the sisters attending the Nigeria Finance Workshop, like Sr. Mary Nwachukwu, CP.

19%\* pursue degrees through ASEC's Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA) program.

## SLDI Virtual Partners Workshop

In preparation for Phase VI of the SLDI program, ASEC held a 3-day Virtual Partners Workshop from June 15-17, 2021. Important discussions took place, especially surrounding updates and changes to the SLDI program planned for Phase VI. Specifically, ASEC will introduce Social Entrepreneurship to the SLDI program and reintroduce Web Design as an advanced technology training option for sisters. ASEC will continue to work closely with partners and consultants to develop the curriculum for these two additions.

## New Program Models

Due to COVID-19, online and hybrid models of SLDI workshops were implemented in order to allow for the continuation of the program in areas

where the pandemic will not allow for gatherings. The online model of the workshop was conducted completely online whereas the hybrid model was a mixture of online and onsite instruction.

Of the 32 workshops\* held in 2020, 10 were online, 5 were hybrid and the remainder were onsite (in person).

## Institutional Capacity Building (ICB)

Initiated in 2019, ASEC's Institutional Capacity Building (ICB) program supports both the internal strength and the external service of national conferences/associations and congregations as they strive to positively impact human development.

In the ICB program, ASEC recognizes the existing capacity of institutions of women religious in Africa and collaborates in strengthening these systems to improve the vitality and vibrancy of institutions of women religious.

The pilot ICB program continued in Year 2.

- 7 workshops for superiors were held in 7 countries; 3 additional workshops are planned for SLDI Year 3.
- The national conference and congregation capacity-building process in Ghana concluded in March, 2021.
- 1 convening of 2 congregations in Ghana was held in 2021 to build capacity in grant/proposal writing.

Delivering the SLDI program during a global pandemic has been challenging to navigate. But, it has also given us the opportunity to reflect, re-imagine and collaborate globally in creative and innovative ways. We are excited to explore what else is possible in the coming year.

You can learn more about the SLDI program at [asec-sldi.org/sldi](http://asec-sldi.org/sldi).



As one who has spent many years in ministries where words such as respect, reverence and compassion were held up as core values of the organization, I have routinely tried to practice by my life or put into words what it means to be a person who respects or reverences others, or who acts with empathy or sympathy with those who journey this path of life with me.

In October of 2019, a few months before the onset of COVID-19, I had the great fortune of traveling to Nairobi, Kenya. Having been invited to deliver the commencement address at the Catholic University of East Africa (CUEA), I set out with wonderment and a bit of trepidation about what I would find when I arrived at my destination.

Once in Nairobi, I was delighted to meet many Kenyan sisters who were participants of ASEC's SLDI program, a large group of sisters who were graduating with the class of 2019 and HESA graduates who had gone on to become leaders in healthcare, education and social services ministries.

## In many ways, I felt like Anna when she saw the Messiah on the steps of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Having heard about the blessings of ASEC for the twenty years of its existence, to see it in action

at last evoked great gratitude in my heart and soul. It was an experience that far surpassed the expectations I had from the start.

In all, I spent only five days in Nairobi. During that time, I met many people and engaged in numerous activities. To this day I still wonder how we managed to attend the two-hour Commencement Baccalaureate Mass, the four-hour Commencement Ceremony, visits to convents, clinics, two universities, gatherings of sisters, a sidewalk market, a giraffe sanctuary and an elephant orphanage.

When my time in Nairobi had come to an end and while it was still fresh in my mind as I boarded the flight to Heathrow and then home, I realized that there was one overarching feeling that enveloped me. It was a sense that I had been treated with reverence during every moment of my time with the people of Kenya.

How and when or even why does one communicate this in the course of re-telling the stories of being at all these events and experiences? It's fun and normal to talk about the giraffes and elephants. It's exciting to recount the university events leading up to commencement. It's awe-inspiring to exchange stories about what the sisters have accomplished as a result of their studies in ASEC programs. But who talks about reverence?

This invitation to address the ASEC's core value of reverence gave me permission to express my gratitude to the people of Kenya for teaching me the very thing I have inadequately tried to portray by my life for many years.

Beyond any other sentiment, I was humbled – by the attentive presence of those who worked at the residence where I stayed, by the heartfelt welcome I felt from the students, professors and administrators of the Catholic University of East Africa, by the gentle, selfless hospitality of every sister I encountered, by the warmth of every person whom I happened to meet during my time in Nairobi, by the pervasive experience of feeling valued, seen, befriended, even beloved.

## This is what it means to have a life-changing experience.

The events were passing, albeit happy, memories. The feeling of being revered by those one might describe as strangers from another land, brings the world together in peace and unity and makes the meaning of life-long friends a reality and a vision for the future of humankind.



Left: Participants of the ASEC Virtual Alumnae Workshop in Uganda wave hello.

Opposite, Top: Sr. Mary Persico talking with an ASEC-sponsored CUEA graduate in Nairobi, Kenya. Opposite, Bottom: Sr. Mary Persico (front, center) with ASEC participants at CUEA Graduation (Oct., 2019).

## 2021 Year in Review

# HESA



1,600+ Served

Since 2013, over 1,600 sisters (~300 in 2020-21)\* have participated in the HESA program.



600+ Graduates

Over 600 sisters (~150 in 2020-21)\* have graduated through HESA with degrees relevant to their ministries.



24 Partnerships

ASEC partners with 24 higher education institutions\* in the U.S. and 10 African countries of operation.



100 Honors Students

Approximately 100 HESA students\* reported graduating with honors in the 2020-21 academic year.

## Higher Education for Sisters in Africa

By Rosemary A. Shaver, M.Ed., ASEC Senior Program Manager, HESA & Scholarships and Tara Lopatofsky, Ph.D., CCLS, ASEC Senior Program Manager, Monitoring & Evaluation

The Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA) program facilitates access to post-secondary education for Catholic sisters in Africa. Since 2013, **over 1,600 sisters\* have participated in HESA**, studying for college diplomas, bachelor's degrees and master's degrees.

ASEC partners with **24 higher education institutions\* in the U.S. and operates in 10 African countries**. Delivered through an innovative model, HESA students participate in cohorts of sisters at partner higher education institutions and receive technological

and academic support to ensure their success as students, scholars and women religious.

HESA positions Catholic sisters as leaders of vital ministries, congregations and communities who address sustainable development in Africa. HESA is funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. The Foundation supported HESA from the beginning, providing a pilot grant through SLDI in 2012 and program-specific grants since 2013. The third phase of HESA (July 1, 2020-June 30, 2024) will support at least 522 sisters for undergraduate and master's degrees.

References for this publication are available at [asec-sldi.org/rays21](https://asec-sldi.org/rays21).



HESA best-in-class graduates from Veritas University in Nigeria at the ASEC graduation celebration (2021).

2020-21 brought innovation and challenges as many sister students transitioned to online or hybrid models of study. ASEC responded to the emergent needs of its sister students and university partners in Africa. As students moved to online studies, ASEC provided funds for internet data and other resources to ensure students' success. Additionally, meetings with university partners in the U.S. and Africa were held at various points to address COVID-19 challenges and ensure students were continuously supported.

A collaborative effort among ASEC, university partners, national conferences of religious congregations and students made it possible for HESA to move forward in the face of unprecedented challenges.

### Enrollments

As of July 1, 2021, approximately **950 sisters\* were actively enrolled** in HESA at partner higher education institutions in 10 countries in Africa. In the 2020-21 grant year, HESA welcomed approximately **300 new students\*** who formed cohorts and participated in orientation workshops in preparation for their studies.

Recruitment is ongoing and it's anticipated that approximately **175 more sisters will enroll in HESA** by June 30, 2022.

### Graduations

To date, more than 600 sisters\* have graduated from HESA with undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. During the 2020-21 grant year, **approximately 150 sisters\* graduated** from the following HESA at partner institutions:

- Catholic University of Cameroon, Bamenda (Cameroon)
- The Catholic University of Ghana (Ghana)
- Holy Family Nursing and Midwifery Training College (Ghana)
- The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (Kenya)
- ChemChemi Ya Uzima Institute (Kenya)
- Tangaza University College (Kenya)
- Catholic University of Malawi (Malawi)
- Sacred Heart School of Nursing (Nigeria)
- Veritas University (Nigeria)
- Catholic University of Health and Allied Sciences (Tanzania)
- Mwenge Catholic University (Tanzania)
- Saint Augustine University (Tanzania)
- St. Francis Hospital Nsambya Training School (Uganda)



### Sr. Winnie Braves Harsh COVID-19 Times to Sustain Street Feeding Program in Kenya

**Sr. Winnie Mutuku** is a Daughter of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul (DC) sister who serves the poor, including street boys in Kitale, Kenya. She earned her Diploma from Tangaza University College (TUC) through ASEC's HESA program in May 2016. She also went on to receive her Bachelor's degree in Social Communication, also from TUC.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been felt worldwide and Kenya is no exception. In Kitale, Kenya, street children, especially boys, are a particularly vulnerable group that has experienced much mistreatment during the pandemic.

Using the education she received through HESA, Sr. Winnie conducted a research feasibility study which revealed a need to create the Upendo Street Children (USC) project. Under Sr. Winnie's management, USC has persevered to continue to serve the boys during the pandemic by instituting outdoor food distributions, reserving a larger space at a cathedral for the boys to come eat and interact and maintaining much needed home visits to the boys' families while still complying with social distancing regulations.

In June of 2020, Sr. Winnie received the **Presidential Order of Service, Uzalendo Award** in recognition of her distinguished and outstanding service in Kenya to help the country through COVID-19.

Read more at [asec-sldi.org/winnie](https://asec-sldi.org/winnie).

Above: HESA alumna **Sr. Winnie Mutuku, DC** (top left), founded Upendo Street Children (USC), an organization that serves homeless boys in Kitale, Kenya (Photos courtesy of Sr. Winnie and the USC Facebook Page).



From Left to Right: 1- Tanzania Reflective Learning Workshop. 2- South Sudan Alumnae Workshop. 3- Sr. Mary Kulume, MSMMC, receiving Best in Education Department award at University of Kisubi graduation, Uganda. 4- At the Tanzania Reflective Learning Workshop, sisters bless each other and thank them when they perform good work, like Sr. Epifania (kneeling) who is always ready to assist others.

- The University of Kisubi (Uganda)
- Uganda Martyrs University (Uganda)

### Academic Achievements

In the 2020-21 grant year, approximately **100 students\* reported graduating with honors**. At least **9 sisters\* received awards for best graduating student**, best in department, or student leadership from their institution:

- **Sr. Betty Namwazi, DM**, Uganda - Marywood University & University of Kisubi, Bachelor of Education - University of Kisubi Meritorious Award for the Best Undergraduate Student in the Faculty of Education
- **Sr. Mary Kulume, MSMMC**, Uganda - University of Kisubi, Bachelor of Science in Information Technology - University of Kisubi Meritorious Award for the Best Undergraduate Student in the Faculty of Business and Information and Community Technology
- **Sr. Irene Atsiech Kwena, FES**, Kenya - The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Bachelor of Commerce - Valedictorian, Class of 2020
- **Sr. Gloria Jacinta Ochu Adoga, SSND**, Nigeria - Rosemont College & Veritas University, Bachelor of Business Administration - Head of Department Award for the Best Graduating Student in Business Administration
- **Sr. Bridget Eze, CM**, Nigeria - Rosemont College & Veritas University, Bachelor of Business Administration - Head of Department Award for the Best Graduating Student in Public Administration
- **Sr. Juliana Uzoma Okafor, SHCJ**, Nigeria - Rosemont College & Veritas University, Bachelor of

Business Administration - Head of Department Award for the Best Graduating Student in Art and Social Science Education

- **Sr. Mildred Kaneng Pwajok, OLF**, Nigeria - Veritas University, Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies - Head of Department Award for the Best Graduating Student in Religious Studies
- **Sr. Gifty Anastasia Blewu, SMMC**, Ghana - Catholic University College of Ghana, Bachelor of Education - Overall Best Student and Best Female Student in the Faculty of Education
- **Sr. Virginia Obiamaka Okeke, MSHR**, Cameroon - Catholic University of Cameroon, Bamenda, Masters in Health Economics - Overall Best Student in the Faculty of Health Economics

### Partnerships

In the 2020-21 grant year, HESA maintained 24 partnership agreements\* with higher education partners in the U.S. and Africa. Since July 1, 2020, five (5) HESA partnership agreements\* have been renewed.

**Framework of Reference agreements were renewed between:**

- ASEC & Zambia Catholic University (Zambia)

- ASEC & National University of Lesotho (Lesotho)
- ASEC & Holy Family Nursing and Midwifery Training College (Ghana)
- ASEC & Catholic University of Health and Allied Sciences (Tanzania)
- ASEC & Mwenge Catholic University, Moshi (Tanzania)
- ASEC & St. Francis Hospital Nsambya Training School (Uganda)
- Uganda Martyrs University (Uganda)

**MOU agreements were renewed between:**

- ASEC, Chestnut Hill College (US) and Catholic University College of Ghana (Ghana)
- ASEC, Chestnut Hill College (US) and Veritas University (Nigeria)

### Alumnae Network

The HESA Alumnae Network is continuing to grow as more students graduate. In 2021, more than 220 HESA alumnae\* participated in ASEC Alumnae Workshops held in 10 countries in Africa. All ASEC alumnae are invited to the workshops and over 50 sisters\* in attendance were alumnae of both the HESA and SLDI programs.

Alumnae Workshops were held both virtually and in-person and

included sessions addressing child protection, human trafficking, safeguarding and time management.

### Reflective Learning

Reflective Learning is an annual academic and professional development workshop that brings together HESA sisters studying at colleges and universities in each country. In the 2020-21 grant year, more than 800 enrolled HESA students\* participated in Reflective Learning Workshops in 10 countries; 7 of these workshops\* were held online due to COVID-19.

Workshop topics emerge from student recommendations and vary according to student and social needs in each country. This year, topics included self-awareness, research methodology, data analysis, emotional intelligence, stress management, gender based violence, child protection and human trafficking.

Students welcomed the opportunity to participate in online Reflective Learning Workshops for a second year. Topics and group discussions highlighted the challenges of COVID-19 in the sisters' communities, in their personal lives and as students, who in most cases transitioned to online learning for all or portions of 2020. Discussions and reports from the workshops on challenges, including conducting research remotely, provided ASEC with valuable insight into student needs going forward.

You can learn more about the HESA program at [asec-sldi.org/hesa](https://asec-sldi.org/hesa).

## Sisters Supporting African Communities Through Farming

Despite housing more than half of the Earth's arable land, Africa imports more food than it produces.\* Limited access to land, finances and other critical resources have made it difficult for Africans to make a living from farming, which has led to poverty and malnutrition in rural areas and a migration of the younger population to cities and overseas.

But, Catholic sisters have seen how with proper support and investment, crop farming and animal keeping can successfully provide for their communities.



During an SLDI field trip to Kasisi Organic Farming Project in Zambia, **Sr. Veronica Nyambe, HBVM**, not only learned about organic farming, but was also inspired to be innovative and to use the limited resources available to support her community.

She started with a variety of vegetables and is now also rearing hundreds of chickens, quails, peking ducks and guinea fowls. The congregation has also purchased a hatching machine with an 88 egg capacity.



HESA alumna **Sr. Anne Kamene, ASN**, has applied her education to develop a farm supporting the Cheshire Home for Girls in Kenya, which provides a residential and training program

for 35 young women with varying mental and physical disabilities.

The home only buys about 5% of the food they eat; the rest of their food comes through donors and resources from their land.



In South Sudan, **Sr. Mary Faida, SHS**, noticed during the pandemic how difficult it was for her neighbors obtain healthy vegetables necessary for their nutritional well-being.

Because of what she's learned in ASEC's programs, Sr. Mary was able to immediately take action. She and her fellow sisters demonstrated how to plant vegetables using sacks and broken buckets on their veranda. Now her neighbors can grow their own food, even though they are renting and don't own any land!

### You Can Sponsor an Sister Using Farming To Support Her Community

Through ASEC's Scholarship Program, ASEC several sisters are studying Animal Health and Production at Kilacha Agriculture & Livestock Training Institute in Tanzania.

Your generous donation can provide an education scholarship for a sister to build efficient and sustainable means of supporting her important ministry work. Just \$85 pays for 1 month of a sister's education.

Make a donation today by visiting [asec-sldi.org/farming](https://asec-sldi.org/farming).

Opposite: Sisters in Tanzania participate in the 2021 HESA Reflective Learning Workshop.

\* References for this publication are available at [asec-sldi.org/rays21](https://asec-sldi.org/rays21).



500+ Served

Since 2012, over 500 sisters (~90 new & 65 continuing in 2020-21)\* have received educational scholarships through this program.



270+ Graduates

Because of our generous donors, over 270 sponsored sisters\* have graduated; 160 secondary school, 90 diploma-level, 20 certificates and 4 bachelor's degrees.



Program Expansion to Lesotho

In June, 2021, the Scholarship Program expanded to Lesotho. The program now serves sisters in 6 African countries.

# ASEC's Scholarship Program Bridging the Gap to Higher Education for Sisters in Africa

By Rosemary A. Shaver, M.Ed., ASEC Senior Program Manager, HESA & Scholarships and Tara Lopatofsky, Ph.D., CCLS, ASEC Senior Program Manager, Monitoring & Evaluation

Since 2012, ASEC's Scholarship Program has been providing scholarships for sisters to complete secondary school or higher education credentials relevant to sisters' ministries.

From 2012-2021, more than 500 sisters\* received scholarships through the program, which now serves sisters in Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Ghana, Kenya and Lesotho.

Approximately 270 scholarship recipients have graduated\* with an education that will assist them in their ministry work.

A 97% retention rate\* reaffirms that sisters who begin the program also tend to stay in the program.

## Form-Level Scholarships

ASEC's Scholarship Program was initiated in 2012 to meet the unique educational needs expressed by sisters in Tanzania, where 65% of women religious lack secondary education.\* ASEC partners with Bigwa Sisters Secondary School (Bigwa) in Morogoro, Tanzania to serve sisters in need of secondary school, or form-level, education.

April 26, 2021, 22 ASEC-sponsored students\* graduated from Bigwa. We're so grateful to all who generously donated to support their education.

## Higher Education Scholarships

In addition to form-level, scholarship recipients also attend programs in various disciplines such as education, medical science, social work, law, accounting and more.

With college diplomas/certificates, sisters are able to receive training relevant to their ministry work.

Scholarships often serve as a stepping stone for sisters interested in pursuing higher levels of education. Many of our scholarship recipients are not yet qualified for acceptance into the HESA program. Scholarships fill the education gap, so sisters can then continue their studies through HESA, which is grant-funded by the Hilton Foundation.



One such example is Sr. Fides Mlacha, FCSM, who was awarded a scholarship to obtain teaching credentials. Sr.

Fides performed so well in the program that she was awarded a Certificate of Academic Excellence for Outstanding Performance in Education at graduation from Jordan University College, Tanzania in December, 2020. Sr. Fides has since been accepted into ASEC's HESA program and is currently pursuing her diploma in Education and Religious Studies.

Other sisters apply for the Scholarship Program to pursue more specialized degree programs related to their ministry work that may not be offered by our HESA partner institutions. Scholarships give sisters the ability to receive specialized training that's relevant to their ministry work.

## Pilot Doctoral Scholarship Initiative

In 2020, ASEC developed a pilot initiative under the Scholarship Program to support women religious in Africa pursuing doctoral degrees. Three (3)

## Scholarship Program Alumna Now Serves as Pharmaceutical Technician in Tanzania



Alumna Spotlight: Sr. Edna Amilima, SOLHC Scholarship & HESA Alumna

Sr. Edna is currently serving as a pharmaceutical technician at St. Benedict Ndanda Referral Hospital located in the Mtwara region of Tanzania. She and her eight coworkers are responsible for dispensing the medication for the entire hospital, an estimated 90-200 patients per day.

In 2012, Sr. Edna was one of the very first sisters to be supported through ASEC's Scholarship

Program, completing her Form 5-6 level education at the Bigwa Secondary School in Tanzania.

Even then, Sr. Edna knew she wanted to serve in the medical field, stating in an essay that her long-term goal was to become a doctor. In 2019, she received her diploma in Pharmaceutical Sciences, made possible through sponsorship via ASEC's HESA program.

Sr. Edna is a shining example of how ASEC's Scholarship Program endeavors to provide women religious access to higher education by bridging the gap between secondary and post-secondary education credentials.

According to Sr. Edna, participating in ASEC's programs has allowed her to competently fulfill her role as a pharmaceutical technician, adding,

"I can perform very well my duties. ASEC's program helps me to do my work effectively and with confidence."

You can support a sister, just like Sr. Edna, by making a donation to ASEC's Scholarship Program today.

Read more at [asec-sldi.org/edna](http://asec-sldi.org/edna).

women religious are participating in the pilot at ASEC partner institutions in Kenya - two at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), (2020) and one at Tangaza University College (2021).



Sr. Esther Wambui Gitee, ASN, is pursuing a Ph.D. in Financial Management at CUEA. In addition to her current

studies, Sr. Esther teaches business studies and catholic religious education classes at Maryhill Girls High School in Thika, Kenya and serves as their business coordinator. She is also an adjunct finance lecturer at CUEA.



Sr. Kiden Christine Janet, MSBVM, is pursuing a Ph.D. in Education at CUEA. Prior to pursuing her doctorate, Sr. Kiden served as the Head of the Department of Education, 2011-2013, and Dean of the Arts and Social Sciences, 2013-2018, at the Catholic University of South Sudan. As of 2021, she has successfully defended her research proposal and is in the dissertation phase of her doctoral studies.



Sr. Christine John O. Amaa, SHS, is studying for a Doctor of Social Transformation at

Tangaza University College's Institute for Social Transformation. Her research focus is sustainable livelihoods and coping strategies among rural men.

The pilot phase of the Doctoral Scholarship Initiative will support the sisters through their education and research requirements for a doctoral degree, as well as engage them in professional development opportunities.

## Program Expansion to Lesotho

In June, 2021, ASEC expanded the Scholarship Program to Lesotho to provide a bridge to higher education and enhance the vitality of congregations in the country.

In August 2021, 20 students from 8 congregations joined the program in Lesotho. They are studying at the high school (13), certificate (1) and diploma (6) education levels.

## Awarding Scholarships

Scholarships are always awarded for the full length of time it will take a sister to complete her education, most commonly 2-3 years.

ASEC's Scholarship Program relies on

donations from our generous supporters to operate. Sisters apply to the program, and, depending on the level of support from people like you, ASEC awards scholarships to the best applicants.

Unfortunately, not all applicants are awarded a scholarship. There are always more sisters in need of an education than we are able to financially support.

Would you consider supporting this valuable program? Just \$85 pays for one month of a sister's education. Make a donation today by visiting [asec-sldi.org/scholarships](http://asec-sldi.org/scholarships).

Opposite: Sr. M. Tryphina Burchard, STH, ASEC Country Director (center), with two ASEC scholarship recipients in Tanzania. Below: These ASEC-sponsored women recently graduated from Bigwa Sisters Secondary School in Tanzania. Thank you to our donors!



\* References for this publication are available at [asec-sldi.org/rays21](http://asec-sldi.org/rays21).

# Catholic Sisters: Building Virtue Bridges

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

Catholic sisters are called to embrace a loving reverence towards God and, by their charity, build bridges that serve the common good of humanity. As one of its core values, ASEC respects the special value, unique talents and gifts of each person created and sustained by God. ASEC accomplishes this goal through **its core value of reverence** that sets up higher value and inclines an individual to show honor and deep respect to other persons. Reverence integrates our beings, and in reverence, humility and charity are united into one virtue.

The **virtue of charitable giving** enables ASEC to be a blessing and a bridge for the women religious in Africa who receive training and education and, in turn, become shining *Rays of Hope* to the people they serve in their societies. Charity is one of the supreme virtues in which God's mercy is passed on from one individual or group to another. Catholic sisters extend this charity through the services they offer across multiple cultures and communities, to the global north and south, operating with an appreciation for the uniqueness of every individual person.

In Africa, however, a majority of the sisters lack the skills they need to provide quality services most needed in their societies. By providing **access to training and education through ASEC**, sisters in Africa are able to impact and make a difference in the lives of millions of people through: education, health-care, fighting hunger and access to clean water. Once empowered, the sisters in Africa educate, offer social services, mentor others, create jobs and strengthen communities.

During these challenging times of COVID-19, Catholic sisters in Africa continue to serve on the front lines, providing care, food and support especially to the sick and the most vulnerable in their societies.



ASEC relies on charitable donations, annual appeals, grant funding, mission appeals and other sources of income to support the training and education of Catholic sisters in Africa. ASEC's Development Office builds on the existing successes to support ASEC's mission while developing innovative initiatives for fundraising and creative ways to engage and maintain relationships with donors.

Although the challenges of the COVID-19 global pandemic continue to significantly impact our development efforts, there have been positive outcomes in the year 2020-21:

- ASEC received several grants to support Catholic sisters in the Scholarship Program that offers two year certificate course in fields related to the sisters' ministries.
- New relationships were formed as ASEC welcomed three women

religious communities who joined ASEC as Associate Members.

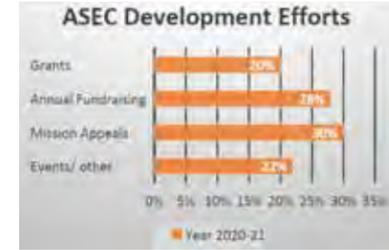
- ASEC received a Want for the Age (WOTA) grant to support the sisters' ministries during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ASEC was invited to participate in the Missionary Cooperative Plan in four Archdiocese/ Dioceses and appeal for support in several parishes.
- ASEC participated in two virtual conferences to market ASEC and get the word out; the Franciscan Federation conference held in May-June and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) virtue 2021 Assembly held in August 2021.



ASEC's Virtual Booth at the 2021 LCWR Conference.

## Why Catholic Sisters in Africa?

At ASEC, we believe that education is the best tool for human development and that when we provide education to a religious sister we are transforming the lives of millions of people in rural villages and those living in the margins in their societies.



## Challenges

The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic have been significant and global and have significantly affected ASEC's fundraising efforts. By providing access to education, sisters in Africa are able to impact and make a difference in the lives of millions of people through: education, health-care, fighting hunger and access to clean water and many more social needs in their societies.

## Will you join our efforts and be a Ray of Hope?

I invite you to join us and be part of our mission. Mindful of the difficult financial shortfalls due to COVID-19, we request you kindly to consider giving a gift to ASEC to help us continue our mission that serves those who live in the margins and are most vulnerable through the services offered by sisters in Africa.

Your contribution will make a huge difference and will help us impact the lives of so many people that the sisters in Africa serve. Thank you very much for your support. Be assured of our prayers for you and all your loved ones. Many Blessings.

You can make an online donation through our secure system by visiting [asec-sldi.org/donate](https://asec-sldi.org/donate). Or, mail checks made payable to **African Sisters Education Collaborative** to 2300 Adams Avenue, Scranton, PA 18509.

Fun Fact

# Sister vs. Nun - What's the Difference?

By Amy Fedele, ASEC Media & Communications Manager

The words "sister" and "nun" are used interchangeably in common speech, even amongst sisters, to describe women religious in the Catholic church. The distinction actually comes between "nuns" and "apostolic women religious."

**"Sister" is an all-encompassing term** that applies to any woman who takes vows in a religious order (including nuns). All women religious take either solemn or simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

**Nuns live, work and pray in a convent or monastery. They dedicate their lives to prayer for humanity.**

Perpetual, solemn vows are taken by nuns in a public setting and recognized by the church as solemn. Nuns also give up all worldly goods including estates, endowments and inheritances.

Nuns live what is referred to as cloistered (enclosed) or semi-cloistered life. They live, work and pray within the monastery or convent, devoted to a contemplative life of prayer for the salvation of all.

Many cloistered nuns only leave the enclosure for serious reasons and on rare occasions. **It's rare that you would meet a nun in public.** However, for some orders of nuns, the rules of enclosure are a bit more relaxed.

**Sisters actively live, serve and pray among us. They dedicate their lives to serving humanity, especially those in need.**

All other sisters take simple vows that can be temporary or perpetual and taken publicly or privately. Sisters can minister and work outside of their religious community. While sisters are able to own property or estates, they are not able to use or earn revenue from them. If they earn an income, the money goes directly to their religious community.

The majority of sisters served by ASEC's programs are apostolic sisters. The life of an apostolic sister combines a life of prayer with a life of active service to humanity—which is called ministry. The details of where a sister lives and how she serves in the world are determined by her religious order, or congregation. Some sisters live in convents while other sisters, because of the location of their ministry, may live in small groups in regular houses (usually rented) or on their own.

As you can see, there are several differences between nuns and other sisters. Women religious is a more encompassing term when referring to both sisters and nuns. However, **these terms are used interchangeably** and are socially acceptable to use.

Have questions about the lives of sisters? You can ask the ASEC staff on Facebook or your favorite social media site.



## ASEC Board of Directors

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- Sr. Carol Jean Vale, SSJ, Ph.D. (Board Vice Chair)
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- Sr. Maureen Erdlen, SSJ
- \*Sr. Theresa Marie Firenze, OSF, MS
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- Pius D. Ojara, Ph.D.
- Sr. Lisa M. Olivieri, SSJ, Ph.D.

\*Welcome New Members

## News & Updates

### ASEC 2021 Board Meetings Held Virtually

ASEC's annual Advisory Board meeting, held on April 28, 2021, is an exciting opportunity to discuss ASEC's programs, review evaluation data and plan for the future of the organization. ASEC Advisory Board, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation Catholic Sisters Initiative team, other invited experts and ASEC staff members were in attendance.

On April 29, 2021, ASEC's Board of Directors meeting was also held virtually. The meeting began with opening remarks and staff introductions. Upon dismissal of ASEC staff, Sr. Jane Wakahiu and the Hilton Foundation's Catholic Sisters Initiative team briefed the board on Hilton's strategy and focus areas. Dr. Tara Lopatofsky then presented ASEC program evaluation data and shared participant success stories with attendees.

The Board conducted regular business before concluding the meeting in the afternoon.

### 2021 Service Learning Trip Postponed Due to COVID-19

Initiated in 2008, ASEC's Service Learning Program enables students, faculty and sisters from ASEC charter institutions to travel to the African countries ASEC serves. Accompanied by mentors, U.S. participants are immersed in a wide range of service opportunities, serving side-by-side with Catholic sisters.

Due to the pandemic, ASEC canceled the service learning trip in both 2020 and 2021. In the meantime, we continue to build infrastructure and partnerships to further enhance the trip experience.

We are very eager to resume the program once it's safe to do so.

You can learn about the program at [asec-sldi.org/service](http://asec-sldi.org/service).

### ASEC Country Director in Malawi Obtains Bachelor's Degree



Please join us in congratulating **Sr. Hilaria Chombo, SBVM**, a senior staff of ASEC and the Country Director of

Malawi, upon her successful completion of her Bachelors of Science degree in **Managing Rural and Community Development**. Sr Hilaria sets a great example for many young and senior people (religious or lay) that "where there is a will there is always a way."

We are so proud of you, Sr. Hilaria! May your great success stand out as a light on the path of achievement for many generations.

### In Memory of ASEC Family

We have said goodbye to far too many ASEC family members over the past year, many due to COVID-19. These losses are great for our ASEC family, but we are grateful for the opportunity to know each person who is no longer with us. We pray that they may rest in eternal peace.

**Fr. Peter Gichure** (8/1/21), HESA Liaison, Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), Kenya

**Sr. Ursula Netty Mutakha, LSOSF** (6/26/21), HESA Participant, Kenya

**Sr. Joan Chisala, CSJB** (6/16/21), ASEC Programs Coordinator, Zambia

**Sr. Maria Fausta Shirima, CSR** (1/22/21), HESA Participant, Tanzania

**Sr. Gwendolyn Mfune, LSSF** (1/19/21), SLDI Alumna, Zambia

**Rev. Fr. Dr. Dominic Kazingatchire** (1/18/21), HESA Liaison, Catholic University of Malawi

**Sr. Magdalena Ndwalwa, TS** (1/15/21), SLDI Alumna, Malawi; Secretary General, Association of Women Religious Institutes of Malawi (AWRIM); Financial Administrator, Archdiocese of Lilongwe

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We are forever grateful for the service of those who have moved on from ASEC over the last twelve months. Thank you for being a part of our ASEC family and sharing your talents and gifts with us.

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• Sr. Kate McCarron, OSF, Former Board Member (October, 2020)

• Sr. Teri Hadro, BVM, Former Associate Member Representative (August, 2021)

• Sr. Mary Anne Heenan, CSJ, Former Associate Member Representative (February, 2021)

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• Melissa Frein, Former ASEC Finance Manager

• Sr. Kevin Karimi, LSOSF, Ph.D., Former ASEC Researcher, Program Evaluation

• Jennifer Mudge, MSW, LSW, Former ASEC Senior Program Manager, Monitoring & Evaluation

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- Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), Washington, D.C.
- ASEC Board Members
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# Prayer During a Pandemic

By Sr. Chris Koellhoffer, IHM

*Loving God, Holy One,*

*Your desire is for our wholeness and well-being.*

*We hold in tenderness and prayer the collective suffering of our world at this time.*

*We grieve precious lives lost and vulnerable lives threatened.*

*We ache for ourselves and our neighbors, standing before an uncertain future.*

*We pray: may love, not fear, go viral.*

*Inspire our leaders to discern and choose wisely, aligned with the common good.*

*Help us to practice social distancing and reveal to us new and creative ways to come together in spirit and in solidarity.*

*Call us to profound trust in your faithful presence,*

*You, the God who does not abandon,*

*You, the Holy One, breathing within us, breathing among us, breathing around us in our beautiful yet wounded world.*



SLDI Tanzania Field Trip, 2021.

# ASEC Forming Effective Agents of Change in Malawi



By Rev. Fr. Dr. Alfred Chaima, Lecturer, Theology and Religious Studies, Chancellor College, Malawi; Theology and Religious Studies, Catholic University of Malawi; Pastoral Coordinator, Archdiocese of Blantyre

Let me take a few moments to reflect on my experience with ASEC's programs. First, where I have been involved to facilitate a few workshops with the sisters under this program. Second, my observation working with them in my own backyard, the Archdiocese of Blantyre, Malawi.

Indeed, I have had opportunities to facilitate workshops with several groups of ASEC being it Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA) Orientations, Reflective Learning or Alumnae Workshops. **What has always struck me is the choice of themes to cover. I have always found them to be challenging, relevant and enriching.** They are both informative and formative, which for me is what the church and society at large need. It does not help to do themes that just remain academic and can't be applied in the real daily lives of the participants or that hardly make a difference in one's ministry and apostolate.

I must say, that ASEC program in this regard is **giving the African women religious to wrestle with the contemporary challenges of both the church and society.** It is my hope that the future ASEC will not divert from this approach as we clearly see that the religious today are more effective in the manner they are living their varied charisma and in the way they approach ministry.

This brings me to my next and second point. The expectation of both the sponsors and the organizers of the ASEC programs is that they change, contribute and influence the events of the world through the women religious who undergo these programs.

**This is only possible if we have women religious that**

**"ASEC programs need to be commended and encouraged," says Rev. Fr. Dr. Alfred Chaima." We pray that the sponsors continue to invest in these programs."**

**are effective on the ground as they live their charism and are engaged in pastoral work.**

Most of the religious members who have undergone this program are demonstrating that. We are able to see in them qualities like confidence, orderliness and result-oriented in the manner they approach ministry.

**In the alumnae, we are able to see tangible successes within their own personal lives, within their congregations and in the Archdiocese of Blantyre, Malawi.**

As mentioned earlier on, we have the religious, who are demonstrating that they have come to make a difference and to offer to both the church and society an alternative way of

living as Christian and as a good citizen. Noticeably, **they are able to engage and challenge the people and move them toward change and development.** We see them helping the local church and the local communities to become more self-reliant, which today is a very noble and urgent project.

Like this, **ASEC programs can be summed up as helping to form true and effective collaborative agents in the local church.** It will not be surprising that within the next few years we shall begin to see a different image of the church and Malawian society altogether.

**ASEC programs need to be commended and encouraged. We pray that the sponsors continue to invest in these programs.**

Make a donation to a sister's education today by visiting [asec-sldi.org/donate](http://asec-sldi.org/donate).



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# Today in Africa...



A child will recover from malaria, thanks to a Catholic sister who has dedicated her life to healing the sick.



That same sister now uses her education to keep her community healthy through local medical clinics.



A village has food to feed their previously starving population, thanks to the education of a Catholic sister.



That same sister now builds a sustainable farm so villagers in rural areas won't have to go hungry again.



Orphaned boys are rescued from the streets and are receiving an education, thanks to the efforts of a Catholic sister.



That same sister now dedicates her life to mentoring abandoned children so they can become the future leaders of Africa.

## Become a *Ray of Hope*

We are committed to alleviating poverty in Africa through the education of Catholic sisters... Sisters who are already working where help is needed most. Will you join us? Donate today and make a big difference for years to come. Your impact is a great blessing!

**Donations support ASEC's Scholarship Program**, which bridges the gap to higher education for African sisters in Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Ghana, Kenya and Lesotho by providing scholarships to complete secondary school or receive higher education credentials relevant to their ministries.

Will you become a *Ray of Hope* and support the education of women who are serving in poor communities across Africa?

## The impact of your donation:

\$20 provides **one week** of education for a Catholic sister

\$85 = **one month** of education

\$250 = **three months** of education

\$500 = **six months** of education

\$1,000 = **one year** of education

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Or, mail checks made payable to **African Sisters Education Collaborative** to 2300 Adams Avenue, Scranton, PA 18509

Contact us at anytime by calling 570.340.6089 or visiting [asec-sldi.org](http://asec-sldi.org).

## More Ways You Can Help

Here are some of the ways you can support our ASEC sisters.



### Fundraise

By setting up a **Facebook fundraiser**, you can raise awareness and collect donations on behalf of ASEC.



### Share

When you **share, comment and like** our social media posts, you help us get our story out to more people.



### Shop

Select ASEC as your charity of choice on **Amazon Smile or eBay** and they will donate a portion to ASEC.



### Volunteer

Sign up for our **e-mail newsletter** to learn about volunteer opportunities and ways to get involved.



### Donate

**Just \$85** pays for one month of a sister's education! Be a *Ray of Hope* by making a donation today.

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