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Sisters making mainstream headlines

Lisa Gutierrez | Apr. 11, 2014 NCR Today
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The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate [1] recently did a study about the effects of debt on educational debt and vocations to religious life. One young woman is trying a creative online solution for her student loans. This story and other happier tales, including some basketball-loving sisters, made headlines this week.

Fund-a-nun?

Mary Beth Baker has some business to take care of before she joins the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia [2] in Nashville, Tenn.: a hefty student loan bill.

So she's using crowd-funding sources to pay it off.

ABC News [3] reports that Baker owes $25,000 for her philosophy education at Christendom College, a Catholic liberal arts school in Front Royal, Va.

She's working in public relations in Washington, D.C., right now but plans to enter the Dominican community in mid-August.

"You're taken care of, but you're definitely not making money," she told ABC about how religious life works. "From there, you have to get rid of everything you own, so I will slowly be giving away my library and my clothes and sell my car."

Baker said she hit a point in her life last year where she was no longer happy with work and the dating scene, she told ABC, so she started praying and meeting with a priest who put her in touch with the sisters.

She's raised more than $8,000 so far on the Fundly [4] website, where she writes: "I ask that you prayerfully consider helping me reach my fundraising goal of $25,000. I have two months to get there. Please also consider spreading the word. More than anything else, though, please keep me and the other young women who will be entering with me in your prayers. God bless you!"

Calm after the storm

Sr. Jane Dominic Laurel, the Dominican sister who created a firestorm at a North Carolina high school last month with her comments about homosexuality, is taking a sabbatical from her teaching job at Aquinas College in Nashville, Tenn.

The college president's statement on the college's website [5] said that Sr. Laurel went too far in parts of her March 21 speech, according to *The Charlotte Observer [6]*.

Although no video or audio recording exists of what was said at the school, students reported that Sr. Laurel

suggested that gays and lesbians are not born with same-sex attractions and that children in single-parent homes have a greater chance of becoming homosexual.

She has not commented publicly about the speech, which led to petitions and a special meeting with parents that attracted more than 1,000 people last week.

Aquinas president Sr. Mary Sarah said that Sr. Laurel "spoke clearly on matters of faith and morals," something she is qualified to do as a trained theologian.

But "her deviation into realms of sociology and anthropology was beyond the scope of her expertise," she wrote.

Thank you, Mr. President

Eighteen members of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood this week paid a call on Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe to thank him for helping them build their Sacred Heart Girls High School in Esigodini.

The school, nearly 80 percent complete, opened in January, according to AllAfrica.com [7].

The first family's donations, worth $460,000, included a perimeter fence and construction of a modern dormitory.

The nuns gave the president belated birthday gifts and wedding presents to his daughter, Bona.

"He is very simple, friendly and easy to talk to. That is why we had to sing songs of gratitude and birthday songs for him in celebration of his birthday," said Sr. Maria Veronica Dingi, who led the thankful delegation.

She said the president promised to work with them until the school is finished.

A fond farewell

The New Orleans Advocate [8] paid tribute to Sr. Eva Regina Martin who died Monday at the Lafon Nursing Facility in New Orleans.

Sr. Martin, 74, was the former director of Xavier University's Institute for Black Catholic Studies [9] and congregational leader of the Sisters of the Holy Family [10] in New Orleans.

The IBCS institute was founded in 1980 to prepare clergy and laypeople to minister to African-American communities. Sr. Martin left her post there in 2003 to lead the Sisters of the Holy Family, an order of African-American nuns.

In a 2001 interview, Sr. Martin spoke about black Catholics in New Orleans, many descended from slaves. After their experiences with segregation, "some of them are bitter; some have never come back (to the church)," she said, while others kept the faith.

"They wanted to pass the faith on to their children, and they suffered," she said. "It was that faith that carried them, that spirituality that carried them, that liberated them."

Sisters to politician: Cease and desist

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in Apopka, Fla., had a recent run-in with a mayoral candidate there, reports WFTV [11].

A Spanish-language flier distributed by the re-election campaign of Mayor John Land, 93, claimed that the city helped buy land for the Hope CommUnity Center [12]. The center is a "service learning community dedicated to empowerment of Central Florida's immigrant and working poor communities," according to the mission on their website.

"The information is not correct in the flier," said Sr. Gail Grimes. She emphasized that the group would never endorse a candidate. "Nobody asked us if they could put something here."

Grimes said Land's campaign jeopardized the center's nonprofit status because it is not allowed to get involved in politics.

Land lost the mayor's office in a run-off election on Tuesday, ending one of the longest political careers in Florida's history.

Answered prayers?

There was never any doubt which team the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist would root for Monday night when the University of Connecticut [13] played the University of Kentucky [14] in the NCAA men's basketball championship.

The community, based in Meriden, Conn., has been fans of former UConn coach Jim Calhoun since 1986, his first season with the team. They even sat court side at the team's first national championship 15 years ago.

"It was a thrill. It was just a thrill," Sr. Mary Richards recalled for FoxCt.com [15].

The sisters spoke with great calm before Monday night's game, possibly because three of them now work at the Vatican in close proximity with Pope Francis, the TV station noted.

"He would not want us to lose," Mother Shaun Vergauwen said with a smile. "I am sure."

She was right. UConn won.

His new cooking habit

Ireland's popular celebrity TV chef, Donal Skehan [16], has new muses ? the Benedictine sisters at Kylemore Abbey [17] in Connemara, County Galway.

The young host of "Kitchen Hero," who is making name for himself rediscovering the Irish kitchen, recently brewed up new recipes with the order, reports *The Irish Independent [18]*.

"I spent the afternoon in Sr. Karol's kitchen where she demonstrated a favorite recipe of hers ? a light sponge cake filled with a lemon curd with just the right tang and sweetness," he told the newspaper.

"While we pottered around the kitchen, Sr. Karol spoke to me about the food in the abbey, cooking duties and confessed her preferred TV cooks ? Nigel Slater being one of her absolute favorites."

His visit to the abbey will air when the new season begins in May.

[Lisa Gutierrez posts weekly for Global Sisters Report, a new website under development; for now her work [19] will appear here on ncronline.org. She can be reached at lisa11gutierrez@gmail.com.]

Editor's Note

: The *National Catholic Reporter* is embarking on a groundbreaking project to give greater voice to sisters around the world. To learn more about this project or sign up for email alerts visit, http://ncronline.org/sisters [20].

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[1] http://cara.georgetown.edu/index.html
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[3] http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2014/04/the-one-thing-holding-woman-back-from-joining-convent-and-it-isnt-what-you-think/
[4] https://fundly.com/
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[15] http://foxct.com/2014/04/07/uconn-basketball-has-the-support-of-these-nuns/
[16] http://www.donalskehan.com/
[17] http://www.kylemoreabbey.com/
[18] http://www.independent.ie/entertainment/tv-radio/sisters-give-their-seal-of-approval-to-donal-skehans-tasty-dishes-30151818.html
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