Blog



CBS News' Bill Whitaker interviews Ne'Kiya Jackson and Calcea Johnson on 60 Minutes (NCR screenshot/CBS News)



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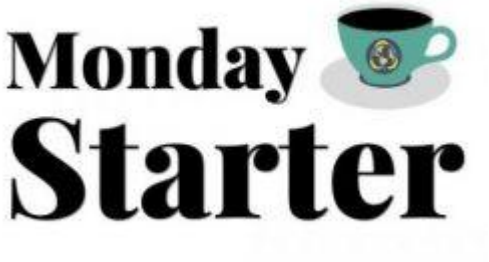
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Editor's note: *Global Sisters Report's Monday Starter is a feature from GSR staff writers that rounds up news from or about women religious that you may otherwise have missed.*

Former NBA star Charles Barkley is donating $1 million to St. Mary's Academy in New Orleans, a prominent Black Catholic school founded by the Sisters of the Holy Family, an African American congregation, because he was inspired by the work of two academy graduates who discovered what many said was an impossible mathematics proof.



According to a May 29 report in the Black Catholic Messenger, the $1 million gift was prompted by a recent segment of the CBS News program "60 Minutes," which featured academy graduates Calcea Johnson and Ne'Kiya Jackson, who are now students at Louisiana State University and Xavier University of Louisiana, respectively.

On a May 5 segment, they related their mathematical discovery, which prompted headlines and more than 1 million social media views, the Messenger reported.

The segment also garnered the attention of Barkley, the renowned one-time basketball player and NBA commentator, who is said to never miss the popular CBS news program, and was impressed by the graduates and their education at the academy.

As reported by the Messenger's Nate Tinner-Williams, the two women were academy seniors when "discovered a new trigonometric proof for the Pythagorean Theorem, sparking discourse on the history of the formula and its enduring conundrums."

"Only one other similar proof has been found before, and experts have said the acumen required to do what the two teens did is rare. Their work was presented at an academic conference last year," the Messenger reported.

The two women have denied being mathematics geniuses but said all praise is due to the rigorous education they received at St. Mary's — one of the oldest Black Catholic schools in the United States. The school was founded in 1867 by the Sisters of the Holy Family. The congregation's founder is Venerable Henriette DeLille, a long-time advocate for Black education, whose path to beatification has been championed by the congregation.

St. Mary's current president, Pamela M. Rogers, told Bill Whitaker of CBS that for 17 successive years, the school has had both a 100% graduation rate and a 100% college acceptance rate, the Messenger reported. Johnson was the school's valedictorian in 2023.

"Our students can do anything, and that's what we tell them," Rogers told Whitaker on the CBS broadcast.

Congregation providing $1 million grant to Laudato Si Movement

The Congregation of St. Joseph is building on its commitment to the principles of *Laudato Si*' with a multi-year, $1 million grant to Laudato Si' Movement.

A press release announcing the grant says it "moves an ongoing partnership between the congregation and the Laudato Si' Movement to a deeper level and builds on a history of collaboration around a shared purpose."

Pope Francis issued the encyclical on care for our common home in 2015, and congregations of women religious across the United States have embraced its principles and committed to its tenets. The Congregation of St. Joseph notes that its mission, to bring "all into unity with God, with one another, and with all creation," fits perfectly with the ideas of *Laudato Si'*.

"As the consequences of climate change and biodiversity loss affect more and more people across the United States and around the world, Catholics find themselves at a turning point," the announcement says. "This is the critical moment to honor our Creator and care for each other by protecting Earth, our common home."

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The congregation says its support will enable Laudato Si' Movement to equip a network of lay leaders to engage their communities in the effort. The network is already advocating for moral climate policies, organizing prayer services, and encouraging everyone to move to renewable energy sources.

The group already works with partners including Catholic Climate Covenant, Franciscan Friars Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe, St. Kateri Conservation Center, Ignatian Solidarity Network, Network, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, and many others, the announcement says.

"The Congregation of St. Joseph is dedicated to the care of creation and to taking steps to strengthen, heal, and renew the face of Earth. We are hopeful that this grant and our support of the Laudato Si' Movement will encourage collaboration and amplify the work of many other organizations committed to protecting our common home," congregational president Sr. Kathleen Brazda said in the statement. "With our resources and efforts, we remain committed to supporting innovative ways of protecting and healing our world so that 'All may be One.' "



On April 20-21, 25 Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and affiliates made a pilgrimage hosted by the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, visiting St. Coletta of Wisconsin, where the original sisters first served, then to Milwaukee where they spent time at the Sisters of St. Francis' convent and Calvary Cemetery, seen here, where the original sisters from Bavaria are interred. (Courtesy of Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration)

Congregations celebrate common history with pilgrimage

Two Franciscan congregations in Wisconsin recently celebrated 175 years of common history with a pilgrimage to sites both look to as foundational.

In 1849, six women in the Third Order Secular Franciscans traveled from Bavaria to Milwaukee intent on founding a religious community to serve German immigrants. The new order, the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, was the first congregation of Franciscan women in the United States.

In 1871, the community split in two, with some sisters moving to La Crosse, Wisconsin, where they became the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. Now, both congregations are celebrating 175 years of ministry.

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For Margie Bleuer, an affiliate with the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, the experience was profound.

"Hearing the beginning stories of a need, a call, of commitment and sacrifice, of the trials and uncertainties of their covenant and deep compassion to follow the will of God became a realization for me," she said in a congregational article about the trip.

Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration Sr. Rose Elsbernd said the experience inspired her.

"The stories of the early sisters are filled with hardship and suffering, but also iron wills of determination, hearts of faithful purpose and bodies that endured only through courage," she said in the article. "Today I ask myself if I am willing to move into the future with similar zeal and courage to take risks. I pray that I can."



FSPA pilgrims taking in a historical timeline at St. Coletta of Wisconsin, the first ministerial site for the sisters who traveled to Jefferson, Wisconsin, from Bavaria. (Courtesy of Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration)

Salesians mark two global days focused on children

Salesian missionaries and the development arm of the Salesians of Don Bosco are marking two international days of humanitarian commemoration focused on work assisting children.

The first day, International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression, is commemorated annually on June 4 each year since its 1982 United Nations designation.

In a recent announcement, the Salesian Missions notes that the day "acknowledges the pain suffered by children throughout the world who are the victims of physical, mental and emotional abuse."

The second day, World Day Against Child Labor, first commemorated in 2002, is marked annually on June 12, bringing needed attention "to the global extent of child labor and the action and efforts needed to eliminate it," the mission agency said.

Of the day marking work for innocent children in war, the agency noted that overall Salesian missionaries, including sisters, working in more than 130 countries around the globe "are working to ensure youth are safe, have their basic needs met and can access the education they need to succeed," the agency said its announcement.

That includes work in locales facing armed conflict, including Ukraine and Sudan. In Ukraine, for example, missionaries have provided prefabricated homes in the western city of Lviv.

On the second day of commemoration, on June 12, the mission agency noted that the theme for that day this year is "Let's act on our commitments: End Child Labor!"

The theme of commitments is important this year because it marks the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the International Labor Organization's Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor (1999). In 2020, it became both universally ratified and "the most rapidly ratified Convention in the UN agency's 101-year history."

Child labor, the mission agency noted, "is associated with lower educational attainment and later with jobs that fail to meet basic decent work criteria. Those who leave school early are less likely to secure stable jobs and are at greater risk of chronic unemployment and poverty."

Many of those who leave school early, particularly between the ages of 15-17, "are engaged in work that is hazardous and classified as the worst forms of child labor."

Mission programs are intended to "rescue children from labor and ensure they have their basic needs met and are enrolled in school," said Fr. Michael Conway, director of Salesian Missions.

One such program is in Bolivia. Thanks to donor funding from Salesian Missions, students attending the Madre Cándida Center, located in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, are taking advantage of new computer equipment — 14 new computers — to improve and upgrade the center's computer laboratory. In all, 125 students — many from low-income families — access technical training at the center.

Salesian Missions is headquartered in New Rochelle, New York, and is part of the Don Bosco Network, a worldwide federation of Salesian nongovernmental organizations.