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Sr. Christabel Juunza Mwangani, center, project manager for the Religious Sisters of the Holy Spirit, inspects some of the local women beneficiaries' agricultural projects in Magoye's Mbiya village, in Zambia's Mazabuka District. (Derrick Silimina)



by Chris Herlinger

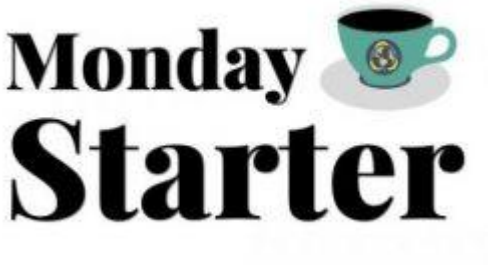
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Editor's note: *Global Sisters Report's Monday Starter is a feature from GSR staff writers that rounds up news from or about women religious that you may otherwise have missed.*



The Religious Sisters of the Holy Spirit from Mazabuka, Zambia, have been honored with the 2025 Opus Prize for a ministry focused on food security and social entrepreneurship.

The congregation, represented by Srs. Christabel Juunza Mwangan and Rosalia Sakayombo, was awarded the $1 million portion of the prize in a Nov. 13 ceremony at Xavier University of Louisiana, based in New Orleans.

The award honors social entrepreneurs "who champion faith-based solutions to persistent problems in their communities," an announcement said.

The congregation's ministries focus on education, health, pastoral and social work, youth, and social entrepreneurship, and were singled out for an initiative that "imparts eco-friendly agriculture and entrepreneurship skills to ensure food security among disadvantaged women," the announcement said.

The program, called the Emerging Farmers Initiative, trains young people to become successful entrepreneurs "who are sensitive to preserving and replenishing Mother Earth — our common home," the announcement said.

The initiative is specifically focused on youth because "they hold the future of Africa, and Zambia in particular," said the announcement. "The Religious Sisters of the Holy Spirit believe that this change in approach to fighting poverty will be sustained if it is introduced to younger generations in their formative years."

The program has been implemented in partnership with the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, a major funder of Global Sisters Report.



The Religious Sisters of the Holy Spirit from Mazabuka, Zambia, led by Sr. Christabel Juunza Mwangan, center left, and Sr. Rosalia Sakayombo, were honored with the 2025 Opus Prize and awarded $1 million at a Nov. 13 ceremony at Xavier University of Louisiana. Also honored were the African Caribbean Community Initiative of Wolverhampton, England, and Micah Ecumenical Ministries of Fredericksburg, Virginia. (Xavier University of Louisiana/Veronica Farve)

The announcement also noted that the congregation is "engaged in transformational leadership that aims to transform the mindset of youth in Zambia, who have often been led to believe that life is only worthwhile if someone has undergone formal education and secured a white-collar job."

The initiative emphasizes acquiring "both academic learning and entrepreneurial skills by young people." Members of the congregation believe such an approach "will transform the social systems and eventually break the cycle of poverty."

The Religious Sisters of the Holy Spirit were founded in 1971 by Bishop James Corboy of the Diocese of Monze, Zambia. The congregation has 48 members.

The prize also honored two other finalists. The African Caribbean Community Initiative, led by Alicia Spence and based in Wolverhampton, England, was honored for providing supportive services to people living with mental health challenges, as well as for raising awareness about mental health issues in the community. Micah Ecumenical Ministries of Fredericksburg, Virginia, led by Meghann Cotter, was honored for its work in promoting housing for all. The Opus Prize Foundation gave each $100,000.

The Opus Prize Foundation partners annually with a different Catholic university to undertake a yearlong process of what it calls "discovery, engagement, and learning that involves the entire campus," culminating in the awarding of the Opus Prize.

This year marks the first time the prize has been awarded at an historically black college or university in the U.S. Xavier is the only such Catholic institution in the United States.

The Opus Prize is awarded annually "to recognize unsung heroes of any faith tradition, anywhere in the world, solving today's most persistent social problems," the foundation said, noting that the $1 million faith-based humanitarian award and two $100,000 awards "are collectively one of the world's largest faith-based, humanitarian awards for social innovation."



Demonstrators are pictured in a file photo during a rally near the U.S. Capitol in Washington calling for passage of the DREAM Act, which would have created a path to citizenship for "Dreamers," who include the beneficiaries of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, known as DACA. (OSV News/CNS file, Tyler Orsburn)

Franciscans urge renewed support for Dream Act

The Franciscan Action Network, a Washington-based advocacy group, is lauding the reintroduction of the bipartisan Dream Act in the U.S. Congress.

The legislation would provide a path to citizenship for recipients of those protected by Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA. That policy provides protections from deportation to young immigrants who were brought to the United States as children.

In a Dec. 4 statement, Franciscan Sr. Marie Lucey, the advocacy group's associate director, thanked Senators Dick Durbin, Democrat of Illinois, and Lisa Murkowski, Republican of Alaska, for reintroducing the legislation in the U.S. Senate and called

on "all members of Congress to provide permanent protections for immigrant youth by supporting and passing an earned path to citizenship as defined in the bipartisan Dream Act." The legislation was reintroduced in the House in February, Lucey said.

In the statement, Lucey said thousands of DACA recipients who were brought to the United States as children "are now adults who know only the United States as home — people who contribute in many ways to their communities and to this society."

"Providing a clearly defined path to citizenship for Dreamers is long overdue," she said. Lucey noted that each time the Dream Act has been introduced in Congress, it has been as a bipartisan measure — though it has yet to pass Congress.

But, she said, "There is greater urgency to pass this bill because DACA recipients face threats of being detained and deported, in addition to efforts to limit their access to education and health care."

Lucey told Global Sisters Report that the bill has wide support from Senate and House Democrats.

"A majority of Democrats will support it," she told GSR. "Our work must focus on Republicans."

Asked about the difficulty in garnering Republican support because of previous Republican opposition to the legislation, Lucey said: "Failures of the bill to pass in previous years must not deter us from advocating for passage in the Senate."

She noted that the legislation has "special urgency" because some DACA recipients have been arrested in recent federal immigration raids. She said members of the Interfaith Immigration Coalition, of which her group is a member, will lobby congressional offices early next year.

"We must call for stopping arrests, respecting the legal status of Dreamers, and call for providing a long overdue earned path to citizenship," Lucey said. "Does it have a chance of passage? Maybe yes, maybe no. But it is critical that we do all we can to urge members of Congress, especially Republicans, to support the bill."

She noted that her group, rooted in Catholic social teaching and the Franciscan values of compassion and justice, has "advocated with and for Dreamers for many years."

Advertisement

Mercy Sisters criticize Trump for insulting remarks

The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas have strongly criticized President Donald Trump for a series of recent public remarks that the congregation called demeaning and insulting.

In a Dec. 10 statement, the institute team of the Silver Spring, Maryland-based congregation noted that, in recent days, the president "insulted people from Somalia as 'garbage,' exploited a tragic shooting to attack people from Afghanistan and immigrants from a dozen other countries, and demeaned women reporters calling them 'piggy' and 'stupid.' "

The New York Times reported Dec. 2 that Trump "significantly stepped up his anti-migrant stance" following the Nov. 26 shooting of two National Guard members in Washington. The gunman has been identified as an Afghan national.

It also noted that Trump "unleashed a xenophobic tirade against Somali immigrants" at a Dec. 2 White House cabinet meeting, "calling them 'garbage.' "

In response to Trump's remarks, the congregation said: "Words matter and have real-life consequences."

"Taking advantage of a tragedy to slander entire nationalities, denigrating ethnic groups, and uttering misogynistic insults against women have no place in a moral society," the sisters said.

The congregation added: "Calling people 'garbage' or referring to them as animals is demeaning and dehumanizing, and we have seen examples of how that can lead to acts of violence, especially against migrants. Leaders and people in positions of power have a special responsibility to set an example."

The sisters also evoked religious tradition, saying, "We are all made in the image of God no matter our gender, race, ethnicity or nationality. And we all have a responsibility to treat each other with respect and dignity and to keep the Lord's command to love one another."