

December 2024

Rays of Hope

Igniting Hope, Building Bridges, Creating Impact

Celebrating

ASEC @ 25

Celebrating 25 Years of Hope: ASEC's Silver Jubilee Milestone

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



Welcome to the 2024 Silver Jubilee Edition of *Rays of Hope*.

This is an especially noteworthy edition, as 2024 included several milestones for the African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC):

1. The year 2024 marks the 25th anniversary of the foundation of ASEC (1999-2024), celebrated under the theme, “**Igniting Hope, Building Bridges, Creating Impact.**”
2. On December 7, 2024, ASEC will hold a gala to pay special tribute to its founders who are fondly referred to as ASEC’s Founding Mothers—Sr. Anne Munley, IHM, PhD; Sr. Kathryn Miller, SSJ, PhD; Sr. Marcia Sichol, SHCJ, PhD; Sr. Carol Jean Vale, SSJ, PhD; Sr. Mary Reap, IHM, PhD; Sr. Marie Lucey, OSF; and Sr. Anita Cattafesta, OSF.
3. Three of the Founding Mothers will receive the first Founding Mothers Award at the gala, namely—Sr. Anne Munley, IHM, PhD, Sr. Carol Jean Vale, SSJ, PhD, and Sr. Mary Reap, IHM, PhD.

ASEC is deeply aware that it is God who ignites the light of hope, allows the bridges to stand strong in a storm, and causes the planted seeds to grow to full harvest (1st Cor 3:6-9).

The jubilee year of 2024 honors ASEC’s Founding Mothers and their collaborators for their courage to dream big with limited resources, but with generous hearts of love, faith, hope, and trust in God. These women religious drew strength from developing meaningful partnerships including with the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, which has been the “wind beneath the wings” of ASEC since 2007, the associations of women religious, and the university partners in Africa. Over the last 25 years, it is these partnerships that provided the fertile ground for ASEC to take root and grow exponentially across 11 African countries—Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and most recently Zimbabwe.

The 2024 *Rays of Hope* and 25th anniversary theme invites us all to:

Ignite Hope

By providing leadership that intentionally dreamt big, ASEC’s founders fanned into flame the gift of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 1:6) in each beneficiary, building the skills and competence most needed by the Catholic sisters in Africa. Already over 10,500 of these sisters are actively igniting hope through service to humanity, especially to people living in the margins of society in Africa and globally.

Build Bridges

The Founding Mothers of ASEC in their wisdom and experience chose the path of collaboration and partnership to generate vital connections, networks, and access for ASEC to deliver educational programs for Catholic sisters in Africa. Cognizant of the sisters’ individual talents and abilities, the Founding Mothers, with love, generosity, and deep trust in God, invested time and resources in relationships as the foundation stones that would sustain ASEC’s mission. ASEC at 25 is a celebration of collaboration and partnership par excellence.

Create Impact

The enduring mission of ASEC is to **strengthen the capacity of Catholic sisters in Africa** so as to build a formidable team of “servant leaders.” These leaders are actively serving humanity to develop their full human potential and live their lives with dignity as children of God. Since 2007, ASEC’s women religious alumnae have transformed more than seven million lives through their ministries. Today, these individuals have a reason to hope, to smile, to celebrate the fruits of the transformation, not only in their individual lives, but also in their societies, both locally and globally.

In this 25th anniversary year, will you “ignite hope, build bridges, and create impact” by allowing the dream of ASEC’s Founding Mothers to live on and support the education of Catholic sisters in Africa?



SLDI Finance participants in Malawi.

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 often 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 the African Sisters Education Collaborative, or ASEC, are always evolving; **molding to meet the specific needs of sisters** serving in the rural and poor communities of Africa south of the Sahara.

Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI)*

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

Institutional Capacity Building (ICB)*

Housed under SLDI, ICB 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.

Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA)*

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

The Scholarship Program

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

Service Learning

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

Research Initiative*

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

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

The Contagion of Selfless Leadership

Sr. Mary Persico, IHM, EdD, Outgoing Corporate Member of the ASEC Board of Directors & Former President, Marywood University



*People of immense diversity,
unbounded energy,
remarkable potential,
unrivaled graciousness,
joyful presence, and intrepid courage*

—these are the unwavering characteristics of the people of sub-Saharan Africa, and among them we find our friends from the African Sisters Education Collaborative. At the twenty-five-year mark of the founding of ASEC, one of life's greatest mysteries has revealed itself once again. The Founders and those who followed in their footsteps have received far more than they have given to the good people of Africa.

The Founders of ASEC believed in the power of education and the impact it might have in the lives of African women religious and their people for years, decades, and perhaps centuries to come.

The desire to empower the group's unknown friends in the southern hemisphere was a significant driver in early conversations, limitless requests for funding, and hours of strategic preparation. Only 25 years later, an insignificant amount of time for the building of a great organization, thousands of sisters have been educated in ASEC's programs.

One key concept in the minds of the founders as they advanced these programs was the idea that the development of skilled, competent, and humane leaders would result in the eventual flourishing of a people struggling with challenges such as access to clean water, energy shortages, unemployment, poverty, and the need for sufficient healthcare and better education, among many others. In a short time, with the immense help of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and other generous donors, sisters in 10 sub-Saharan countries became confident as they discovered their inherent gifts and put them to use in the

service of others.

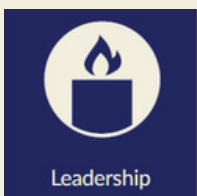
One example of such progress is the St. Francis Community Hospital-Kasarani, Nairobi, Kenya. There, Sr. Esther Wairimu Mwangi, LSOSF, a HESA graduate, has successfully taken on a leadership role and turned a failing ministry into a viable healthcare setting for the local people. In the accompanying photo, Sr. Esther is seated at her desk (a rare occurrence) at St. Francis Hospital. As she passes through the corridors of the hospital, patients smile and wave as she addresses them by name and assures them that they will receive the care and attention they need.



Sr. Esther Wairimu Mwangi, LSOSF, HESA alum, serves at St. Francis Hospital in Kenya.

This hospital is one example among many where ASEC program alumnae take leadership roles in schools, clinics, counseling centers, and social service agencies, where people are served every day of the year and their lives are improved. In turn, ASEC leaders mentor others into leadership roles and the cycle of empowerment stretches far into the future and inspires hope to all in its path.

All initiatives come with unintended, yet often amazing consequences. It is an intangible characteristic, but *hope* now lives in the lives of those who have been the recipients of ASEC's meaningful work and vibrant leadership. **Where there is hope, people thrive. In 25 short years, selfless leadership has ignited hope in a people who will one day pass it to new generations of African people, ASEC's friends forever.**



Leadership

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

ASEC enhances the **leadership capacity of women religious** in Africa to leverage their strengths and those of their sisters, staff, students, and others they influence, to achieve common goals.

Building Bridges Through Technological Innovation and Research

By **Tara Lopatofsky, PhD, CCLS**, ASEC Senior Program Manager, Monitoring & Evaluation (M & E) & **Melanie Rosato**, ASEC Data Manager, M & E

ASEC has been striving since 2016 to build a centralized database to house the immense amount of information the organization holds about its program participants and their impact across the globe. Having a centralized database allows ASEC to track those it serves and to monitor where and how alumni of its programs minister. This information helps ASEC improve the quality of its programs and assess emerging educational and training needs among women religious. Over the last four years, ASEC's database capabilities have grown in leaps and bounds. The technological innovation that has come with this development has allowed ASEC to improve not only its monitoring and evaluation capabilities, but also build bridges with partners to engage in important research studies on the lives and ministries of sisters in Africa.

Bridging Operational Gaps

Although preparation for a comprehensive ASEC database can be traced back to 2016, building of the current iteration of the database formally began in 2020. In 2020, ASEC entered into a partnership with external technology consultant, WorX Solutions Management, LLC, whose mission is to bridge operational gaps and make workflows easy. With the assistance of WorX and the use of a workflow automation platform, ASEC was able to merge participant and alumni information from all five core programs into one cloud-based system. Housing ASEC's data in such a system has improved ASEC's data integrity and guarantees more accurate and correct data is gathered.

Technological Innovation

ASEC's database has many automated features, which allows data entry tasks to be completed more quickly. The database is also integrated with ASEC's electronic survey platform, allowing information to feed directly from program participants, who are sitting in workshops in each of our 11 countries, to the desks of data managers at ASEC's United States headquarters, in real-time. This eliminates the need for multiple follow-ups regarding missing information and allows data to be processed and analyzed at a faster rate than ever before.

Further, in the most recent phase of ASEC's database rollout, ASEC Africa staff have been extensively trained to view and enter data directly into the database. Providing this access ensures that ASEC United States and Africa offices are referring to the same datasets. ASEC anticipates that Africa staff training will continue throughout the next year.

Research Opportunities

Having a robust and comprehensive database has allowed ASEC to more effectively promote research on Catholic sisters in Africa and advance its Research Initiative. ASEC now holds a central repository of data related to women religious in Africa, and as such has become a sought-after entity for partners with similar interests. In the last year, ASEC became an even more prominent leader in sisters' research—partnering with the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the Centre for Research in Religious Life and Apostolate (CERRA-AFRICA), the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), and external research consultants to provide accurate data that would only be possible with the use of the new database. In the coming years, ASEC will continue to explore ways in which it can safely and constructively utilize its database to the benefit of all Catholic sisters in Africa.



Creating Impact

ASEC Alumnae Impact on Beneficiaries

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

ASEC has made great progress in moving beyond evaluating impact of our programs on individual alumnae, to assessing the broader effects at the beneficiary and community levels. From August 2023 to March 2024, ASEC piloted a Catholic Sisters Beneficiary Survey, which received a total of 734 responses. Results of this survey provide evidence supporting the positive impact alumnae of the SLDI and HESA programs are having on the people they serve.

Who are ASEC Catholic Sister Beneficiaries?

ASEC considers Catholic sister beneficiaries anyone who has directly come into contact with and benefitted from the ministry/services of an ASEC program graduate, including sisters' students, patients, clients, etc. ASEC alumnae were encouraged to have at least one beneficiary complete the survey on their behalf but were permitted to distribute the survey to as many people as possible. Respondents were required to be 18 years of age or older.



SLDI alum, Sr. Monica Kawira Muteqi, SCC, serves as Headmistress at the Holy Cross Nursery and Primary School in Morogoro, Tanzania.

Key Beneficiary Survey Results

Key results gathered via the 2024 ASEC Beneficiary Survey included:

- 97% ($n = 734$) report that sisters have improved their quality of life.
- 99% ($n = 540$) indicated that sisters are trusted figures in their community.
- 98% ($n = 536$) prefer utilizing institutions (e.g., schools, hospitals, etc.) run by sisters.
- 98% ($n = 537$) report that sisters in their country are competent.
- 98% ($n = 537$) indicated that ASEC programs are preparing sisters to better serve their community.

Beneficiary Impact Statement Highlights

Beneficiaries were also asked to describe the impact ASEC alumnae have had on their lives. Responses to this survey item were powerful and provided descriptions of many concrete ways sisters are making a difference in the lives of the people they serve. Some examples included:



“They are the ones that I have journeyed with from when I was a nobody in education till here, wherever I have reached in my education, I truly thank them for making me who I am today, for making sure that I have a better life.”

“I am a survivor of trafficking and if it wasn't for Sister Lilly to hold my hand and 14 other girls, I don't know if I would still be alive. I am strong today because I have her in my life.”

“I am who I am because of the empowerment received from the Catholic sisters and I feel to be a true servant of Christ.”

“Catholic sisters have nurtured and groomed me to what I am, they have impacted a great level of discipline to my life which is still the reason as to why I am progressing and succeeding in everything.”

“Because they have given a baseline of Catholic faith and I'm able to be proud of being a Catholic.”

“They contributed to the reason why my right ankle was not amputated as a result of a road accident when I was taken to their hospital.”

“I have learnt humility, patience and resourcefulness. Their ability to create and make things out of a little is always a take home for me.”

“I am what I am because of the Catholic sisters.”



SLDI

2024 Year in Review

Sisters Leadership Development Initiative

By *Nicole Vilogi-DiPietro, MBA, ASEC Program Manager, Programs & Sneh Akruvala, PhD, ASEC Program Manager, M & E*

The Sisters Leadership Development Initiative (SLDI) offers Catholic sisters in 10 African countries the opportunity to enhance their leadership competencies and professional skills in the areas of technology, administration, finance, and web design. The SLDI program collaborates with partner consultants, congregational superiors, and national conferences/associations of women religious to develop and deliver month-long workshops, taught over a three-year period. SLDI graduates increase the program's outreach by mentoring at least three other sisters after their completion of the program.

Since the program's inception in 2007, SLDI has served 4,413 sisters, empowering them to become more effective in their congregations and apostolates. An additional 2,373 individuals were served through other program activities, such as Superior and Partner Workshops, totaling 6,786 individuals served by SLDI.

SLDI Phase VI, Year 2, began in April 2023 and concluded in March 2024. In SLDI Phase VI, Year 2, 837 sisters participated in 37 Leadership Workshops; 432 in Administration, 332 in Finance, and 73 in Advanced Web Design. Year 2 workshops focus on building participants' leadership capacities in areas relevant to their ministries. Leadership skills are covered in depth during Years 2 and 3 of the program. The SLDI program also marked the introduction of social entrepreneurship to the Year 2 and Year 3 curriculum. At the start of Year 3, sisters "pitch" their social entrepreneurship ideas using the framework and sales skills they learned in Year 2.

SLDI alumnae have shown incredible levels of success once given the gift of education. Graduates of the program go on to demonstrate positive impact on their communities in tangible and effective ways.



94% of SLDI alumnae use the leadership, administrative, and/or financial skills they gain from SLDI in their ministries.



6.8 million people, mostly in rural areas, are served by SLDI alumnae annually.



29,590+ individuals have been mentored by SLDI alumnae.



Left to right: SLDI field trip participants in Tanzania, field trip participants in Malawi, graduates in Nigeria.

SLDI Events & Highlights

SLDI Partners Workshop

The SLDI Partners Workshop was held January 7-11, 2024, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. More than 60 partners—38 SLDI facilitators and 25 ASEC staff—participated in the workshop designed to facilitate networking, learning, and development for SLDI Phase VII. Notably, facilitators from CORAT Africa and Advisewise engaged participants in a review of the SLDI curriculum for each track as part of a curriculum enhancement project for SLDI Phase VII.

Curriculum Enhancement Project

ASEC continued collaborating with CORAT Africa on a SLDI curriculum enhancement project. The project involves reviewing and reorganizing the curriculum into modules, incorporating social entrepreneurship content, and quantifying the number of hours spent in identified content areas. The purpose of this project is to enhance the SLDI curriculum for Phase VII and provide students with a detailed testimonial of the skills obtained from SLDI.

Field Trips & Graduations

SLDI Phase VI, Year 3, workshops began in April 2024. Workshops will conclude in December 2024 and one graduation will take place per country beginning in August 2024. Throughout the grant year, ASEC is planning a combination of online and onsite workshops and field trips, with in-person graduations. SLDI graduation ceremonies will incorporate a celebration of ASEC at 25 when feasible.

Institutional Capacity Building

The Institutional Capacity Building (ICB) project supports congregations and national conferences/associations of religious in strengthening their organizations' internal systems in areas such as governance, strategic planning, financial or asset management/development, human resource management, leadership/administration, and/or data management. Housed within the SLDI grant, the project grew out of an identified need for congregational and organizational capacity strengthening beyond the level of training individual sisters. The ideology behind ICB is that if systemic improvements become institutional priorities, congregational leaders will attain a greater capacity to improve the internal systems of their organizations. Unlike other ASEC initiatives that aim to improve the capacity of individual sisters, ICB aims to improve the systems the sisters operate within. In the last year, several key milestones were achieved under the ICB project including:

- Completion of the intensive capacity building process with the **Association of Women Religious in Malawi (AWRIM)** and **Association of Religious in Uganda (ARU)**.
- Facilitation of **8 ICB Congregational Leaders Workshops** in SLDI's countries of operation with the exception of Nigeria and South Sudan.



SLDI participants visit the Carmelite Sisters Primary School in Malawi.

HESA

2024 Year in Review

Higher Education for Sisters in Africa

By **Rosemary Shaver, EdD**, ASEC Senior Program Manager, Programs & **Tara Lopatofsky, PhD, CCLS**, ASEC Senior Program Manager, M & E

The Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA) program facilitates access to post-secondary education for Catholic sisters in Africa. More than 2,196 sisters have participated in HESA since 2012, representing 281 unique congregations. Through HESA, sisters are studying for college diplomas, bachelor's degrees, and master's degrees at ASEC's 24 partner higher education institutions in 10 African countries and online in the U.S.

HESA was designed with a framework that recognizes Catholic sisters as adult learners with unique educational needs. Sisters typically join HESA from ministry work and having been out of school for many years. To facilitate networks and support structures, 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 including Orientation and annual Reflective Learning Workshops.

After 12 years of implementation, findings from evaluation data and alumnae success stories demonstrate that HESA positions Catholic sisters as leaders of vital ministries, congregations, and communities who address sustainable development in Africa. In 2024, 79% of HESA alumnae reported gaining leadership roles within their ministries and 66% reported leadership roles outside of their ministries. Building on expertise gained through educational attainment and capacity-building workshops, HESA alumnae exemplify ASEC's core value of leadership as confident and competent women leaders in their societies.



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



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



97% of HESA alumnae report receiving degrees that are relevant to their ministry and needed in their community.



Left to right: HESA graduates in Uganda, graduates in Malawi, Reflective Learning students in Ghana.

Enrollments

As of July 1, 2024, approximately 828 sisters were actively enrolled in HESA at partner higher education institutions in 10 countries in Africa. In the 2023-2024 grant year, HESA welcomed 100 new students who participated in Orientation in preparation for their studies and formed cohort networks at partner institutions.

Sisters participating in the HESA program are highly motivated and academically successful, maintaining a comprehensive 96% retention rate. Sister students actively engage in student life, provide spiritual enrichment through campus ministries, and average a B grade point average, with 77% receiving a B average or higher. Many sisters serve as student leaders among their lay and religious peers. Sr. Mariana Ignace Audifas Kavishe, CSS, for example, graduated from Catholic University of Health and Allied Sciences (CUHAS), Tanzania, in November 2023, with a Doctor of Medicine degree and leadership experience as the Secretary of the CUHAS Priests and Sisters Union for two years.

Graduations

More than 1,411 sisters have graduated from HESA with undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. During the 2023-2024 year, 249 sisters graduated from HESA. More than 84 graduates in 23-24 reported receiving honors and other special awards. Notable recognitions include:

- Sr. Constance Chalwe Mandona, SCJ, who was awarded Best Student in Bachelor of Arts with Education at the Zambia Catholic University.
- Sr. Yvonne Chipasha, SFMA, who was awarded Best Student in Bachelor of Commerce with Education at the Zambia Catholic University.
- Sr. George Francsica Khooa, SNJM, who received several awards including the Alina and Paul Mokete Memorial Award for Best Student in Bachelor of Science in Biology and Chemistry, the Lesotho Electricity and Water Authority Award for Best Student in Bachelor of Science in Biology and Chemistry and the Chembi Laboratories Award for Best Student in Chemistry at the National University of Lesotho.

Partnerships

ASEC continues to maintain 24 partnership agreements with higher education partners in the U.S. and Africa to deliver HESA. Many partnership agreements were renewed over the last year in preparation for the next phase of HESA which began in July 2024. Since July 1, 2023, HESA renewed online-onsite agreements with Chestnut Hill College (U.S.) and Veritas University (Nigeria), Rosemont College (U.S.) and Catholic University of Eastern Africa (Kenya), Chestnut Hill College (U.S.) and Catholic University of Ghana, and

Marywood University (U.S.) and University of Kisubi (Uganda). HESA also renewed onsite agreements with National University of Lesotho, Zambia Catholic University, Holy Family Nursing and Midwifery Training College (Ghana), Veritas University College (Nigeria), Catholic University of Malawi, Catholic University of Cameroon, Bamenda, and Catholic University Institute of Buea (Cameroon).

HESA Phase IV Approval

ASEC submitted a grant application for HESA IV to the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation which was approved in early 2024. HESA IV will serve 424 sisters in 10 countries between 2024-2028. The grant also includes funding for activities such as the HESA Partners Conference and research.



HESA alum, Sr. Vera Bi Kiekiseeh Otia, HH CJ, addresses students at St. Pius X Comprehensive and Technical College in Cameroon.

ASEC Alumnae Making Positive Change

ASEC organizes annual Alumnae Workshops in 10 of its countries of operation. These workshops provide professional development and networking opportunities to alumnae of the SLDI and HESA programs. In 2024, Alumnae Workshops were offered both online and in-person. In addition to providing additional skills and training, the Alumnae Workshops provide an opportunity to administer ASEC's annual Alumnae Survey, through which valuable data is collected. This data highlights and documents the impact alumnae are having on those they serve. Further insights are collected through in-person and virtual site visits and interviews. The stories below call attention to the results of some of the interviews and site visits conducted in 2024.

Technical & Vocational Training in Cameroon

Sr. Vera Bi Kiekiseeh Otia of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus (HH CJ) is an SLDI and HESA alum who recognizes the importance of technical and vocational education and training. She has served as principal of St. Pius X Comprehensive and Technical College (SPICOTEC) in Bota-Limbe, Cameroon since November 2023. SPICOTEC is a highly valued institution in the local community, where parents understand the importance of technical skills and want their children to attend so they can be "self-employed and job creators." The school currently enrolls 250 students annually and employs a staff of 28, all supervised by Sr. Vera.



Training Future Nurses in Kenya

Sr. Gertrude Muhatia of the Sisters of Mary of Kakamega (SMK) congregation in Kenya, believes that the skills, knowledge, and integrity she has developed serve her best while teaching at Kenya Medical Training Center. A 2017-2021 HESA alumna, Sr. Gertrude is currently a nurse educator and national examiner. She believes that her training through the HESA program was "not a waste." As a valued member of her team, she aims to empower students through individual and group feedback. She has also become a qualified examination officer and is a member of the Secretariat of Examinations in Kenya.



Controlling Antimicrobial Resistance in Tanzania

Sr. Catherine Felix Kimario of the Sisters of Christian Charity (SCC) is a graduate of ASEC's Scholarship Program, having earned a Diploma in Pharmaceutical Sciences in 2023. She currently works at the Holy Cross Health Centre in Kihonda, Tanzania, a facility that serves more than 1,000 patients annually. What she has found through her work is that many of their patients are reluctant to use their prescribed medications or fail to complete their full course, particularly antibiotics. Sr. Catherine counsels patients, educating them on why it is so important for them to follow instructions and informs them of the consequences of not using their prescriptions properly. In particular she emphasizes the dangers of antimicrobial resistance, a problem that has posed a significant health threat in Tanzania. She credits her studies with giving her not only the knowledge that allows her to perform her duties, but also a sense of authority and confidence in herself as she works with her patients and manages the pharmacy's operations.



Learn more about these impressive ASEC alumnae and others at asec-sldi.org.

Crossing the Language Divide: SLDI's Pilot French Cohort in Cameroon

By Sr. Archille Tchinha, SSA, SLDI Finance Participant, Cameroon



Sr. Archille Tchinha, a Sister of Saint Ann (SSA), currently serves as a school teacher and vocation animator for her congregation. She is also a pioneer participant in ASEC's first French speaking SLDI Finance cohort (2022-2024) in

Cameroon. This new offering expands the reach of the SLDI program to the nearly 46% of sisters in Cameroon that are French speaking only, a previously underserved population of sisters in need of the vital skills and knowledge provided by SLDI. Although French-speaking by origin, Sr. Archille enthusiastically offered her perspectives on the pilot French SLDI workshop below.

[Participating in the SLDI French Finance Track] has been an amazing experience even though it has not been easy twisting the old brain to welcome something new or sitting for hours the whole day for this purpose. Beginning from the fact that there was quite a "lack" as far as all the knowledge gained is concerned. Starting right back from basic technology skills, with the tools at our disposal, I learned how to manipulate these digital tools and it was so exciting. It seems as if all my difficulties in my apostolate were solved. It has not only been formation for my apostolate but for myself, with stress and time management and for our congregation and communities, social entrepreneurship, and reports writing. I'm coming out now feeling like a professional and this brings about some esteem and fulfillment within me.

Obviously, this knowledge empowers me to give myself in my apostolate. From the first year that I began ASEC, I started using the knowledge—preparing my lessons in PowerPoint, which captivates my students and keeps them attentive and focused and spares me from copying bulky notes on the board. When I have a talk with youths, which sometimes can be more than five hundred, I present my talk to them in PowerPoint. I type my exams myself using Word documents without going again to the school secretariat. I taught my sisters and some teachers interested in these skills, which they found helpful in their teaching ministries, thus I mentored them on that and many other things. **Therefore, it is not over, I will keep on using the skills for my apostolate, my community, my congregation, and myself.** Right now, I am attempting to write a grant with knowledge I acquired, to help raise funds to build a

dormitory for internally displaced girls in my area.

As a vocation promoter of my congregation I do flyers with captivating images and the essentials of my congregation to send to girls aspiring and this speaks to them more than my words, thanks to the SLDI program.

My capacity to speak French and English is a great benefit for me to transmit the skills received without complaining of a language barrier. Whenever I speak to youths or I'm mentoring somebody I do not need translation, I easily switch into any of the languages to reach out to those in need of me. Therefore, it will not matter whether the person/sister I mentor will be English-speaking or French-speaking. I will joyfully do it without any problem. I'm convinced that it's very valuable for ASEC to continue to offer a French speaking cohort to the sisters. Moreover, they also need it for their personal growth. For during the formation I experienced sisters being so excited, expressing joy and wonder. I could see in each the feeling that "I can also do it," manifesting thanks to the SLDI program.

This program brought us together, making new friends, building new relationships, helping one another in teamwork to come out with a project writing, struggling to learn together the skills we never had before. In addition, through this, I have weaved relationships that will last which would not have been if this program did not exist. It is my great desire to collaborate with other SLDI students in future, whether in Cameroon or elsewhere so that the spirit and the skills keep growing and enriching one another. I even thought that after these three years, there would be a continuation of the program for more skills to be acquired.

It is so beautiful, so enriching, so empowering, so fulfilling. I did not acquire a hundred percent of all that was given but I am very grateful and happy with what I have.

Again, this year, I will be the bursar of my community; I will also be the dormitory mistress in school. **My skills acquired in finance lessons and ethical leadership will be of great help to me as I begin this new academic year, all these, thanks to the SLDI program.** I really wish to continue if there will be another opportunity.



CAMEROON



GHANA



KENYA



LESOTHO

ASEC @ 25

Celebrating
Around the World



MALAWI



NIGERIA



UNITED STATES



SOUTH SUDAN



TANZANIA



UGANDA



ZAMBIA



ASEC @ 25 Years

We have learned, we have grown, we have thrived,
Through your guidance, our future is bright.
You have nurtured us into great leaders who
Make a difference in the world,
Shining like stars in the dark night.

Twenty-five years of empowering African sisters,
Nurturing us to be more productive and self-reliant.

We stand tall, heads lifted high,

On the shoulders of the great founders,
Giving glory, honor, and praise to God, our guiding star.

To educate Catholic religious women in Africa
And strengthen their leadership capacity
Is the mission fulfilled thus far

Through transformation, collaboration, leadership,
Service, capacity building, and reverence.

ASEC, the mother of all,

Watching the dreams of African religious come true,
Filled with love, compassion, and support,
Lifting everyone to reach the heights.

With joyful hearts, we say thank you

To the founders of ASEC for showing us the way.

You have shaped us into strong women with great vision,
And our dreams are now being fulfilled.

ASEC, our beloved mother, the foundation for all;
We celebrate you and take pride in being part of this family.

Forever, we shall be grateful.

May the mission and vision of ASEC endure for all time.

By Sr. Emmanuelina Musiimenta, MSMMC, HESA Student, Uganda



Stand with ASEC & Expand the Reach of Catholic Sisters

By Sr. Nancy Kamau, LSOSF, ASEC Development Director, Maureen Elliott, ASEC Assistant Development Director, Jake Stevens, ASEC Media & Communications Manager, & Megan Wescott, ASEC Digital & Social Media Specialist, Mission Advancement

Igniting Hope - Why Catholic Sisters?

For 25 years, ASEC has empowered Catholic sisters to become beacons of hope, providing education and resources that enable them to transform communities across Africa. Catholic sisters possess an unwavering commitment to serve, regardless of uncertain outcomes. They are planting hope in places where it is scarce, knowing even the smallest seed of impact can yield abundant fruit. As we celebrate this milestone, we reflect on Catholic sisters' unique role in building a brighter future.

Creating Impact - A Sustainable Future

ASEC's programs have touched the lives of countless individuals by equipping sisters with the knowledge and skills needed to address some of the most pressing issues in their communities. Through education, healthcare, and technology training, these sisters become agents of change in their communities, making a positive difference in the lives of those they serve.

The stories of impact shared on our website (asec-sldi.org), social media, and within this newsletter demonstrate the significant influence Catholic sisters have when they are equipped with education. From building schools in underserved areas to advocating for environmental conservation and championing education for all, ASEC alumnae are fostering hope.

Building Bridges - How You Can Be a Ray of Hope!

There are many gaps in the world—education, opportunity, and access to resources. ASEC is committed to bridging these gaps by providing sisters with the education and leadership skills they need to create solutions to the problems their communities are actively facing. Our work is transforming lives and paving the way for a brighter future, and we know ASEC will go down in history for making this tremendous impact.

As we celebrate 25 years of igniting hope, we invite you to join us in building these bridges, becoming a part of history. Your involvement—whether donating, spreading ASEC's mission, volunteering with us, or attending our events—will help us ensure that ASEC's work continues for another 25 years and beyond. Catholic sisters are beacons of hope and change, but they cannot do their work alone. By standing with us, you help expand their reach and amplify their voices.

Together, let's build bridges that will ignite hope, causing impact. Your support will help us build a more just and compassionate world. Thank you for being a part of ASEC's mission. May God bless you for your continued support and prayers.

Make an online donation through our secure system by visiting:

asec-sldi.org/donate

Or, mail checks made payable to:

**African Sisters Education Collaborative
2300 Adams Avenue, Scranton, PA 18509**

A Letter from the Mission Advancement Unit

A warm welcome from the ASEC Mission Advancement (MA) Unit!

We are thrilled to share with you exciting news! This year marks 25 years since ASEC was founded. This is a historic year for ASEC as we commemorate this milestone, with great gratitude, for the unwavering mission of ASEC founders, who for the last 25 years have remained faithful to their commitment to support the education of Catholic sisters in Africa. The theme of this Silver Jubilee Year is “Igniting Hope, Building Bridges, Creating Impact.”

Established in 2018, the MA Unit (formerly Development Office) saw great growth over the last three years. Working collaboratively with a great team, ASEC has not only enhanced our creativity and diversity, but also, built a strong link between ASEC staff, donors, and collaborators.

The MA goal is to scale up ASEC’s philanthropic support by formalizing a Path to Sustainability system that can support the future of ASEC’s programs. To achieve this goal, the MA team works collaboratively to advance ASEC’s mission through diversified fundraising options, events, networking, communications, marketing, and social media.

Now as we look to a sustainable future, strengthening the

capacity of the growing number of sisters in Africa requires a significant ongoing investment and dedicated funding from you—our friends, supporters, and donors. I invite you to join ASEC’s collaborative efforts by:

- Sharing the story of our life-giving organization;
- Volunteering to assist ASEC in our endeavors;
- Increasing your contribution;
- Making pledges;
- Inviting a friend to donate to ASEC.

ASEC’s past accomplishments and stories of tremendous impact across the globe indicate a successful future. Join us as we celebrate 25 years of hard work, dedication, and success in our milestone anniversary and support us as we look forward to another 25 years.

Thank you for being valuable supporters of ASEC. God bless you abundantly.

Sr. Nancy Kamau, LSOSF
ASEC Director of Development



ASEC staff complete site visit at Mgolole Orphanage in Tanzania, January 2024.

Nothing is Impossible: ASEC Service Learning Reflections from Kenya

By Madilyn Grose, 2024 Service Learning Participant, Marywood University



Upon arriving in Kenya on ASEC's Service Learning Trip, I was greeted at the Dorothea Rescue Centre by the kindest young girls I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. The Dorothea Rescue Centre provides rehabilitation and development opportunities for girls from the streets of Nairobi and surrounding areas. The girls are housed, fed, rehabilitated, taught, and cared for by a lovely group of sisters.

After a quick introduction, many hugs, and a couple happy tears, the girls took us by the hand to Our Lady of Assumption Mission School, which is a day/boarding school for children in the nearby areas. I spent the next 21 days working with these incredible children. I spent each day at the school with the preschool-aged kids. We sang, danced, and colored, but also worked on academics such as reading, writing, and speaking English. The teacher of this class, Teacher Carol, often allowed me to lead activities and assist her in grading. I was beyond impressed with their skills and dedication to learning. When the school day ended, I often found myself volunteering at the center, where I had the opportunity to get to know the girls better. We played games, did crafts, watched movies, and sometimes just talked. At both service sites, I created important and impactful relationships that will last a lifetime.

As a wheelchair user, I was worried about the reactions I would receive in a foreign country. In hindsight, I had absolutely nothing to worry about. ASEC, the kids I served, as well as the sisters and teachers I worked with, fully embraced me and my disabilities. Everyone I met was eager to make things as accessible as possible. I will never forget the love and kindness that I was shown.

Truthfully, I imagine that the impact I left on the kids I served is not as intense as the impact they left on me. I went to Kenya with the hope of showing children that nothing is impossible regardless of disability, and I can proudly say that I did that. I taught kids how to respectfully interact with people who have disabilities and educated them that sometimes people's bodies don't work in the same ways as theirs do, and that it is okay. That was my personal mission on my Kenya trip and I was happy to see it come to fruition. These kids weren't trying to make a difference, they weren't trying to inspire me, yet that's exactly what they did. Creating relationships with them,

hearing them call me their "new best friend" or "Teacher Madi" and watching them thrive was incredible for me.

This service learning experience taught me so much about Kenya. I saw what extreme poverty looks like and witnessed the results of their reality. I learned that some parents in Kenya cannot afford to raise their kids which leads to an increased number of orphans, homeless children, or kids getting trafficked for money. I listened to the children share their lives before the Centre which included the most heartbreaking traumas I have ever heard. Furthermore, I also learned about and experienced a beautiful Kenyan culture. I had the opportunity to learn their daily prayers, some Swahili words, and some of their customs and traditions. I fell in love with the mountains, red dirt roads, acacia trees, animals, the night sky full of stars, and the overall beauty of Kenya.

Being in Kenya changed everything for me. On our last day, Sr. Caro told us to say hello to our families in America, and to never forget our new family in Kenya. I cannot wait to reunite with my Kenyan family. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to have made an impact in Kenya, and equally as grateful for the impact they made on me. I am forever indebted to Marywood University and ASEC for providing me with the opportunity to be a participant on the 2024 Service Learning Trip.



Top to bottom: Children at Our Lady of Assumption Mission School play, Madilyn Grose with children at Cottolengo Home for Orphaned children in Kenya.

Little Girl, I Say to You, Rise Up; Igniting Hope for Human Trafficking Survivors

By **Tara Lopatofsky, PhD, CCLS**, Senior Program Manager, M & E & **Jake Stevens**, Media & Communications Manager, Mission Advancement



Sr. Jackline Mwikali Mwongela, IBVM, leading the Talitha Kum Youth Ambassadors Training of Trainers Workshop in Dodoma, Tanzania.

“I feel I am in the right place. I’m fulfilling part of my religious vows.”

Sr. Jackline Mwikali Mwongela of the Loreto Sisters of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM), an alum of ASEC’s Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA) program, feels this way about serving in her ministry. Sr. Jackline has been the Project Manager of Religious Against Human Trafficking (RAHT), a member of the Talitha Kum network in Kenya, since 2021. Sr. Jackline believes women religious are uniquely positioned to address complex and important social justice issues, such as human trafficking, because “we are people who are committed to do the work, do the work in whatever part of the country, even remote areas. We are motivated by values in religious life and the charisms of our congregations. Sisters are trying to accomplish the mission of their congregation, and they do it with love. Sisters will help any person regardless of ethnicity, in service to humanity.”

Talitha Kum is part of the International Network of Consecrated Life Against Human Trafficking, consisting of 58 networks across 97 countries and nearly 6,000 Catholic sisters and allies. Formally established in 2009 by the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) in Rome, Talitha Kum is an umbrella organization that facilitates networking at the national, regional, and continental levels, providing support for victims, survivors, and people at risk for human trafficking. Talitha Kum networks, most commonly organized at the national level, are sister-led, inter-congregational, grassroots initiatives that work in close partnership with the country’s national conference/association of women religious. Each of these networks works to end human trafficking, also known as modern day slavery, in which people are treated as commodities, bought and sold, in a cycle of social injustice.

The organizations’ name, Talitha Kum, is derived from the Gospel of Mark (5:41), when Jesus says to a child believed to be dead, “Talitha Kum,” meaning “Little girl, I say to you, rise up” in Aramaic. The young girl rises and begins to walk. The expression “Talitha Kum”, inspires hope and courage, which is why it was chosen for the organization—to remind those involved to stand with victims and survivors of human trafficking, and “promote a just world in which every human being can live in dignity and fullness, thus fulfilling Christ’s message.”

RAHT was established in 2016 and is the Talitha Kum network in Kenya, hosted by the Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya (AOSK). Currently, RAHT has more than 40 religious institute members and aims its anti-human trafficking efforts on the four Ps—prevention, protection, partnership, and prayer.

Sr. Jackline began working to counter human trafficking during her education practicum, completed as part of her HESA Bachelor's Degree, at Tangaza University College in 2017. During her practicum, she worked to educate vulnerable

children about human trafficking in the slum areas surrounding Nairobi, Kenya, a cause she became increasingly passionate about. In 2019, Sr. Jackline was invited to attend the Talitha Kum International Conference in Rome and completed her leadership course in 2020. She was then called to serve as Project Coordinator for RAHT, receiving grant funding from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation to provide anti-human trafficking services.

Sr. Jackline explains that human trafficking affects everyone, particularly children, youth, and women ages 18 to 40. In the last two years, RAHT has rescued over 120 victims of human trafficking, focusing not only on saving these survivors but also uplifting and empowering them to live lives with dignity, justice, and compassion. For instance, RAHT rescued a group of women from cheap labor and sex work in early in 2024. The women have now returned to their home country of Uganda, where they were supported in enrolling in technical skills and training programs. A good number of those women graduated from their training programs in June 2024 and are now empowered to go back to their communities and utilize their new skills, some starting their own businesses.

If you or someone you know may be a victim of human trafficking, contact **Religious Against Human Trafficking in Kenya at 0800721361** or the **National Human Trafficking Hotline in the United States at 1-888-373-7888** or text **"Be Free" to 233733**.



Sr. Jackline runs a radio station human trafficking awareness campaign.



Sr. Jackline teaches others the 4 Ps of Religious Against Human Trafficking.

The 4 Ps of Religious Against Human Trafficking (RAHT)

Prevention – RAHT raises awareness about human trafficking to assist individuals, families, and entire communities in resisting exploitation. They believe “empowering knowledge is the first step towards protective defense.” RAHT shares knowledge and strategies by offering anti-trafficking training and running public awareness campaigns.

Protection – In order to protect victims who are rescued, RAHT provides safe shelter that allows “fear to subside and healing to begin.” The healing services provided are holistic, including medical care, trauma-informed counseling, social services, repatriation, economic empowerment, and access to legal aid.

Partnership – RAHT collaborates with like-minded civil society organizations, government ministries, community leaders, and faith-based organizations. Each partner brings unique strengths and perspectives, “building a stronger, united front against human trafficking.”

Prayer – Rooted in the Catholic faith, RAHT leads prayer for the victims and perpetrators of human trafficking, “trusting that even the darkest hearts can be touched by the transformative power of God’s love.” Specific days of global prayer are February 8th—International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking and July 30th—World Day Against Trafficking in Persons.

Scholarship

2024 Year in Review

ASEC Scholarship Program

By Sarah Martin, PhD, ASEC Programs Coordinator, Programs, Rosemary Shaver, EdD, ASEC Senior Program Manager, Programs, & Tara Lopatofsky, PhD, CCLS, ASEC Senior Program Manager, M & E

ASEC's Scholarship Program aims to bridge the gap to higher education for sisters by providing scholarships to complete secondary school or higher education credentials relevant to sisters' ministries. The program was initially founded in 2012 to address the specific educational needs of sisters in Tanzania, where 65% of women religious at that time lacked secondary education. However, since its founding, the ASEC Scholarship Program has expanded to serve sisters in eight additional countries.

From 2012-2024, more than 890 sisters received scholarships through the program. Sisters in the Scholarship Program have studied at over 195 educational institutions and represent 125 distinct congregations of women religious.

A 97% retention rate reaffirms that sisters who receive a scholarship successfully complete their programs of study.



In 2023-2024, more than 165 new and 116 continuing students received ASEC scholarships.



More than 582 ASEC-sponsored sisters and women have graduated from their programs of study.



Of those that have graduated, 270 received secondary/form-level credentials and 312 college/university level credentials.



Left to right: Scholarship Orientation entertainment in Tanzania, Bigwa Secondary School graduation in Tanzania, first Scholarship graduates in Cameroon.



Expansion to Zimbabwe

In 2024, ASEC expanded the Scholarship Program to its eighth country, Zimbabwe, bringing ASEC's total of countries served by all programs to eleven. Leadership members of the Conference of Major Religious Superiors (CMRS) in Zimbabwe have expressed interest in expanding ASEC programs to their country for several years. In 2019, ASEC representatives visited Zimbabwe to conduct a needs assessment related to ASEC programs. They assessed educational needs for sisters in Zimbabwe and established a clear demand for educational attainment among sisters there, as well as the need for funding to support higher education. Given this evidence, ASEC made the groundbreaking decision to begin providing educational programming for sisters in Zimbabwe via the Scholarship Program in 2024. On August 8, 2024, the ASEC staff, along with the Chair and Secretary of the ASEC Board of Directors, met virtually with members of the CMRS to sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that initiates our official partnership.

Scholarship Alumnae Workshop Pilot

In 2024-2025, ASEC plans to pilot the inclusion of Scholarship Alumnae in its annual Alumnae Workshops, which currently serves HESA and SLDI alumnae only. The pilot will include approximately 31 Scholarship Alumnae—10 from Tanzania, 5 from Ghana, 5 from Lesotho, 5 from Malawi, 5 from Zambia, and 1 from Kenya—who are not currently served through the workshops.

Bigwa Secondary School

On May 18, 2024, the Bigwa Secondary School in Tanzania held its 35th commencement ceremony. Among the graduates were 33 students—31 sisters and 2 lay women—who were supported through the Scholarship Program. Since 2012, ASEC's partnership with Bigwa has given 274 sisters and lay women the chance to finish their high school degrees, providing them with the education and credentials to go on and better serve their congregations and communities. Of the numerous Bigwa graduates supported by ASEC, 82 have gone on to pursue higher education through our Scholarship and HESA programs.

Doctoral Level Scholarships

Beginning in 2020, ASEC began sponsoring sisters to study at the doctoral level at ASEC partner institutions in Kenya. To date, four women religious have participated in this level of the program with one graduating in October 2021 and the remaining three continuing their studies in 2024.



Top to bottom: Scholarship Orientation in Tanzania, Orientation in Cameroon, and Zimbabwe MOU signing.

Awarding Scholarships

Sisters apply to the program and depending on the support of people like you, ASEC awards scholarships to the best applicants.

Demand for this program is very high, and not all sisters who apply can receive a scholarship. ASEC chooses the top applicants to receive scholarships based on merit and available funding. Scholarships are usually awarded for the full length of time it will take a sister to complete her degree, most commonly 2-3 years.

Mission Advancement

2023-2024 Year in Review

ASEC Mission Advancement & Development

By Sr. Nancy Kamau, LSOSF, ASEC Development Director, Mission Advancement & Megan Wescott, ASEC Digital & Social Media Specialist, Mission Advancement

The year 2024 came to a close, as we reflected on past accomplishments, the challenges faced, the lessons learned, and express gratitude for new opportunities embraced, resources mobilized, number of sisters served, and the growth experienced. To celebrate the significant milestone of ASEC's 25th anniversary, several events were planned this year to mark a quarter of a century of **"Igniting hope, Building Bridges, and Creating Impact."** ASEC's past successes are evidenced by its strong leadership, the growth of its programs, the dedicated staff, the expansion of its services in Africa, and a strong board that continues to support and guide us. Yet each year comes with its own challenges. Even with the challenges of our time and the uncertainties surrounding war and economic pressures that continue to impact global stability, ASEC remains resolute in its mission to educate women religious in Africa to strengthen their leadership capacity to provide services that address local and global challenges.

In 2024, ASEC made great strides toward its mission advancement to scale its portfolio especially on the *Path to Sustainability* campaign. With a bigger team in place, we planned various opportunities to grow our portfolio and share our story to new and varied audiences, broadening ASEC's reach and network. Plans were made to have the Lenten Campaign; the Night of Storytelling event; the LCWR exhibition held in Orlando, FL; the 25th anniversary dinner reception held at the Apostolic Nunciature in Washington, DC; the mission appeals held during summer; the December Gala event to celebrate the 25th Anniversary and honor ASEC's Founding Mothers; and other annual fundraising campaigns. Within the past year, ASEC country offices in Africa have also implemented fundraising initiatives across

the continent. These initiatives have included 25th Anniversary celebrations and engagement of ASEC partners throughout the countries ASEC serves.

All these activities help us to get word out about ASEC and enable us reach out to individuals unaware of ASEC's mission and tell them about the incredible work that Catholic sisters are doing in Africa, transforming the lives of millions of people.

Thank you to the amazing donors who have supported ASEC over the years!

Your generosity enables the sisters in Africa to continue igniting hope, building bridges, and creating impact in their societies. As we look forward to our 25th anniversary celebrations this year, we are offered another opportunity to reflect on the mission, vision, and core values that will enable ASEC be sustainable another 25 years to come. This is a wonderful time to recognize ASEC's corporate members, tell our story, and celebrate everything we have accomplished in 25 years and all that we wish to accomplish in another 25.

Thank you for being valuable supporters of ASEC. Your generosity and commitment to ASEC's mission have been unmatched and we are honored to have you as part of our team. Your generous support has been instrumental in enhancing ASEC's mission.

I invite you to join us as we celebrate ASEC at 25 and give generously to ASEC to enable us be sustainable another 25 years.



Sr. Vera Bi Kiekiseeh Otia, HHCJ, SLDI and HESA alum with pupils in Cameroon.

Throughout 2024, ASEC has been sharing its story with new and varied audiences, broadening ASEC's reach and network.



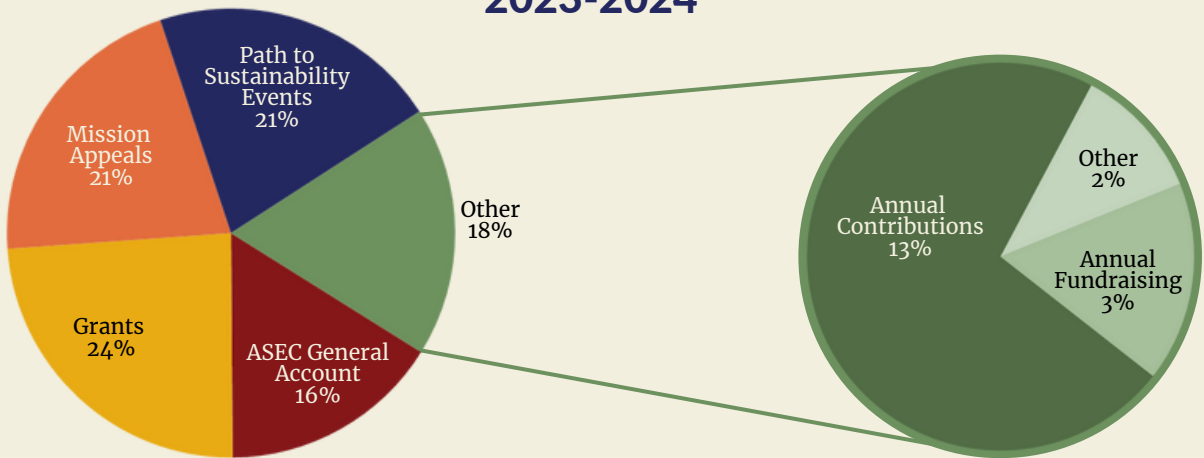
ASEC Board of Directors and staff host a 25th anniversary dinner at the Apostolic Nunciature in Washington, DC.



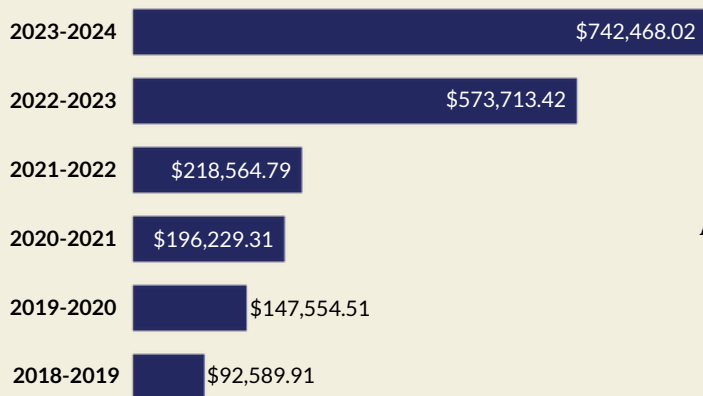
ASEC staff dance at the 2nd annual "Night of Storytelling" event in Scranton, PA.

Mission Advancement Efforts Analysis

Mission Advancement Efforts 2023-2024



Annual Total Contributions



Path to Sustainability Events



2024 Special Research Report

FOUNDING MOTHERS

Detailing ASEC's Founding

By Tara Lopatofsky, PhD, CCLS, ASEC Senior Program Manager, M & E & Diane W. Keller, PhD, LSW, Research Consultant



Left to right: 1st Laptop Distribution, 2006 Summer Tech Training, Agreement Signing with CUCG

ASEC was officially established in 1999 by the leaders of four institutes of women religious and the presidents of the colleges and universities founded by those institutes in Pennsylvania. ASEC's founding institutes include—Sisters of Saint Joseph of Philadelphia (SSJ) and Chestnut Hill College, Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM) and Marywood University, Sisters of Saint Francis of Philadelphia (OSF) and Neumann University, and the Society of the Holy Child Jesus (SHCJ) and Rosemont College. These eight institutes are the Corporate Members of ASEC. The women religious leaders, who were members of the founding institutes and were key to ASEC's inauguration, have come to be known as ASEC's Founding Mothers. ASEC's Founding Mothers include—Sr. Anne Munley, IHM, PhD, Sr. Kathryn Miller, SSJ, PhD, Sr. Marcia Sichol, SHCJ, PhD, Sr. Carol Jean Vale, SSJ, PhD, Sr. Mary Reap, IHM, PhD, Sr. Marie Lucey, OSF, and Sr. Anita Cattafesta, OSF.

After 25 years of service to the women religious of Africa, the ASEC 25th Anniversary Founding Mothers Research Project endeavored to capture the dreams and aspirations of ASEC's Founding Mothers, which led to the establishment of ASEC all those years ago. The purpose of the project was to tell the origin story of ASEC from the perspective of the women religious who were integral, at various stages, to the development of the collaborative. It is hoped that by better understanding ASEC's roots, its history and origins, ASEC will be better equipped to serve the women religious of Africa for years to come.

Data Collection

Individual interviews were conducted with six of the Founding Mothers from August to September 2023. The interviews focused on collecting the Founding Mothers' unique perspectives on ASEC's establishment. In addition, two focus groups were conducted with all participants, the research consultant, and select ASEC staff members in attendance. Further, extensive document reviews of published documents (e.g., ASEC historical newsletters, timelines, and internal and external reports), Neylan Commission Meeting Minutes (1999-2000), and ASEC Board Meeting Minutes (2001-2007) were conducted in August 2023 to provide context and structure for ASEC's historical timeline.

Results

Results were broken down into two main categories—The Founding of ASEC, detailing the collaborative's establishment and key steps in the process from the participants' perspectives, and The Founding Mothers' Experiences, which provides the participants' personal context and reflection on ASEC's establishment. Each main category was then organized by theme. Themes for The Founding of ASEC included—*Setting the Stage-Why Africa, Forming the Collaborative, Bridging the Gap-Fact Finding and Planning, Building Infrastructure, and The Path for the Future-SLDI*. While themes for The Founding Mothers' Experiences included—*Dreams and Motivation, Founding Values, Finding Meaning, and Hopes for the Future*.

Result highlights included the Founding Mothers consensus that ASEC's story needs to be told, the most pressing reason being the possibility that the amazing work that has

been done at ASEC can be replicated in other places.

Additionally, other colleges/universities and institutes of women religious can join ASEC's cause, furthering the impact of the organization and allowing more sisters to access education. Sr. Carol Jean stated, "the story is nowhere finished ... changing these women's lives, giving them the tools they need, will transform the future for both women and men in Africa."

For a complete description of these results please see the full 2024 Special Research Report, available at asec-sldi.org.

Conclusion

Twenty-five years later, the dreams of ASEC's Founding Mothers are now a reality. With more than 10,000 individuals directly served through ASEC programming and over 7 million people benefitting from the efforts of its alumni, ASEC is a thriving organization that continues to adapt to meet the educational needs of Catholic sisters in Africa. Today, ASEC is able to provide African sisters educational opportunities from the secondary to doctoral levels, as well as facilitate training in vital areas of professional development, across 11 countries in Africa. ASEC "has endured and will until its mission is accomplished." Sr. Mary believes that, "this is an example of the continuation of the response of women religious to the needs of their time. Because it's there to be done, you make it work ... when it is of the spirit, when it is of God, I think it works ... and it turns out to be an ASEC."

ASEC is a brilliant example of what can grow from several seeds and strong roots. As Sr. Anne said, "all we had in the beginning were some seeds...seeds of commitment and ... belief." ASEC is now a strong, flourishing organization because of small seeds that were sown back in 1995 and has grown to achieve the vision of the Founding Mothers for ASEC, "being deeply rooted in God, being deeply rooted in mission, the mission of Jesus, which is, everyone has a place and nobody is excluded from the table."

Who are ASEC's Founding Mothers?

As outlined by the Founding Mothers, the establishment of ASEC was a truly collaborative process. For the purposes of this project, seven women are referred to as ASEC's *Founding Mothers*. However, there were many individuals, in addition to the Founding Mothers, that provided vital contributions in ASEC's early days (1999-2007). A full listing, acknowledging the tireless efforts of these individuals, can be found at asec-sldi.org. Please note that this listing is not exhaustive. ASEC recognizes that there are many more contributors, not all of which are listed below or on the website. To all those who have assisted ASEC in growing into the organization it is today, ASEC sincerely thanks you for your tenacity and service!

Below is a listing of the women religious considered ASEC *Founding Mothers* that were interviewed as part of this research project. From top down, in order of appearance:

Sr. Anne Munley, IHM, PhD

Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Sr. Kathryn Miller, SSJ, PhD

Sisters of Saint Joseph

Sr. Marcia Sichel, SHCJ, PhD

Society of the Holy Child Jesus

Sr. Carol Jean Vale, SSJ, PhD

Chestnut Hill College

Sr. Mary Reap, IHM, PhD

Marywood University

Sr. Marie Lucey, OSF

Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia

Sr. Anita Cattafesta, OSF

Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia



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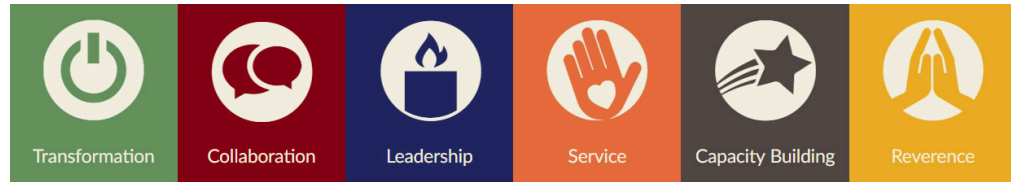
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 Sr. Mary Persico IHM, EdD
 Sr. Rosalia Sakayombo, SHS
 Sr. Barbara Spears, SNJM
 James Sullivan, MArch, RA, AIA
 Sr. Jane Wakahiu, LSOSF, PhD
 Sr. Draru Mary Cecilia, LSMIG, PhD



ASEC Advisory Board and staff meet during April of 2024. Some members participated via Zoom.



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We are grateful for our generous partners, donors, and friends. Without your donations, what we do would not be possible. You are always in our thoughts and prayers.

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Thank You For Your Service

You have given so much of yourself to ASEC during your time of service. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you:

- Sr. Maureen Erdlen, SSJ, MSS, MLSP, MBA, Corporate Member
- William W. Latimer, PhD, MPH, Corporate Member
- Sr. Mary Persico, IHM, EdD, Corporate Member
- Sr. Anacletta Lempe, FSCG, Country Director, Lesotho
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Thank You to Sr. Mary Persico, IHM, EdD

We thank Sr. Mary Persico, IHM, EdD for her dedicated service to ASEC as a Corporate Member. Congratulations and blessings on your retirement.

Welcome to the Team

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

- Lisa A. Lori, JD, Corporate Member
- Sr. Eileen Marnien, SSJ, Corporate Member
- Brian McCloskey, DM, MBA, Corporate Member
- Edward Pikulski, Board of Directors
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- Maureen Elliott, Assistant Development Director, Mission Advancement, United States
- Isabelle Henry, Program Coordinator, Programs, United States
- Sarah Martin, Program Coordinator, Programs, United States
- Sarah Pethick, Office Manager, Administration, United States
- Jake Stevens, Media & Communications Manager, Mission Advancement, United States
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SLDI alum, Sr. Euphemia Beri, TSSF, harvests maize in Cameroon.

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