



Nano Nagle: Passing on her spirit

By Natalie Slieter



“God’s divine hand will uphold us.”

– Nano Nagle

“The Presentation Sisters serve as role models of the power of a positive spirit every day through their words and deeds. They’ve shown me that positive thinking is not about expecting the best outcome every time, but accepting that whatever outcome happens is the best thing for me at this moment. Now that is faith and the living spirit in action!”

– Angie Bakke, chief program officer for EmBe and member of Nano’s Network

Nano Nagle lived 300 years ago in Ireland. She founded the Presentation Sisters that has ministries all over the world today. She showed compassion to the poor and sick as she served them. Another defining quality she is remembered for is her spirit.

Sister Joan Marie Brandner of Aberdeen, SD defines spirit as “energy, enthusiasm, courage and determination.”

Nano was enthusiastic and positive about educating children. This was during a time that education was not readily available to children raised in the Catholic Church due to strict penal laws. But despite everything against her, she prayed, listened and followed God’s call. She knew and believed in the importance of education, so she used her spirit to fight for it. She opened her first school for 30 children living in poverty to be educated. Her spirited being and willingness to take risks resulted in five all-girls schools and two all-boys schools opening in Cork City.

Eventually, her spirit drew people to her so the education system for Catholic children was able to expand.

She also showed spirit as she served the poor and sick. This was a dangerous job during the time as crime was rampant due to poverty and deprivation in Cork City. But her positivity and spirit kept her going night after night to help those in need.

Sister Joan Marie understands the importance of education as well. In the early 1960s, she, like so many other Sisters, was teaching 49 students. One day she was told that another student would be joining her classroom, bringing the total to 50 students. But Sister Joan Marie smiled, remembering Nano’s spirit and was able to joyfully say, “There is always room for one more.”

Sister Joan Marie and the Presentation Sisters demonstrate Nano’s spirit by continuing to educate and serve others locally, regionally, nationally,

and across the globe. Like Nano, the Sisters continue to gather and partner with other Presentation People to go out and respond to current needs throughout the world in faithfulness to the gospel. “From the primitive cultures of Papua New Guinea, Guatemala and Zambia, to south Chicago and Flint, Michigan, there are so many sisters who carried and still carry that torch, that spirit and spark of Nano,” Sister Joan Marie said.

Sister Joan Marie advises readers to have a positive outlook on life, in all circumstances. Show positivity to friends, family and strangers. A positive attitude inspires others and encourages them to also be enthusiastic and take risks for the greater good.

“The root word for spirit is breath; breath is the source of life. Let’s breathe together for a better world,” Sister Joan Marie encouraged.



Sister Joan Marie Brandner serves in parish ministry in Watertown, SD. She also allows her spirit to ignite as she leads regular prayer and fellowship for the Presentation College football team in Aberdeen, SD. To learn more about Sister Joan Marie and the Presentation Sisters, please visit www.presentationisters.org.