On Tuesday evening, October 20, 2015, the Dominican Sisters of Sparkill hosted a unique volunteer event at Dominican Convent in Sparkill, NY. A group of women and girls -- including Associate members, staff and friends of the Sisters, as well as 15 students from Albertus Magnus High School (one of the Sisters’ sponsored schools) -- joined and bonded with the Sisters during an Evening of Service which was focused around the Days for Girls project. Days for Girls is an international, grassroots non-profit organization that engages volunteers to make and distribute quality feminine hygiene kits and provide health education to women and girls in need. Most people are surprised to learn that there are many communities around the world without access to basic sanitary supplies. For a host of reasons, including cultural stigmas, extreme poverty, logistical issues and corrupt governments, many women and girls cannot access the hygienic supplies they need. Women without this access miss up to 2 months of school or work each year, perpetuating a damaging cycle of poverty, illness and violence. Days for Girls provides a critical service to needy women, and its global network of thousands of volunteers and supporters reaches women and girls in more than 85 countries.

The Dominican Sisters of Sparkill have been engaged in this project since February 2015. They were first introduced to it by a staff member, their Director of Communications, Kara Donsky, who volunteers at her local Northern NJ chapter of Days for Girls.

"I knew the Sisters would find this project meaningful and that we had to get them involved. It is so in line with the community's social justice concerns and is an incredibly worthwhile cause," said Kara. "The head of my local chapter, Kathy Goldrick, is a former student of the Sisters, and we kept talking about how we could bring the project to the convent. One evening we gave a presentation about Days for Girls to around 40 interested Sisters. At the end everyone in the room said they'd like to get involved, and so we've been running monthly meetings here ever since!"

The meeting on October 20th was an extra special gathering, though. The fifteen high school students who attended were given a brief presentation about the Days for Girls project and watched video interviews of women sharing first-hand about how these hygiene kits are making vast improvements in their lives. Expressions of shock and amazement were on every girl's face. The group then began their evening’s work -- students pulled up chairs alongside Sisters and other volunteers, working together to stencil patterns, cut fabric, sew, assemble kit bags and more. Wonderful conversation was shared, new friendships were started, and the energy in the room was tremendous.

“Bringing completely different age groups together for a cause that all women can understand and relate to was so amazing,” said project leader Kathy Goldrick. “After learning about this issue and what the project does, the typical first reaction is shock and disbelief that in the year 2015 this problem exists. The high school girls identified with the less fortunate girls who are their age, and want to help make sure they stay in school and get educated. When everyone got to work on different aspects of the project, it just didn't matter what age you were or who you were… everyone in the room had a common goal -- to help women. We accomplished so much that night for our next batch of 25 kits which will be going to Haiti next week!”
This Evening of Service was also special as it was one of the Dominican Sisters’ events offered during the **Year of Consecrated Life**. This important year in the Catholic Church is currently being celebrated to recognize women and men religious and to help lay people gain a deeper connection to those in religious life. As part of this celebration, religious congregations have been inviting people to share in experiences of prayer, reflection, service, and community life. The Sisters saw the Days for Girls project as a perfect service opportunity to share with female students at their nearby high school during this year, and that is exactly what took place on October 20. Fifty-six women and girls gathered for the Evening of Service, nearly double the size of the Sisters’ typical monthly meetings.

For the Sisters, having the volunteers and students join them brought new meaning to the project.

“We always enjoy welcoming young people into our home, especially since so many of us spent our lives ministering to children in parishes, schools, etc.,” said Sr. Bridget Kiniry, who is one of the project’s organizers at the convent. “Our lives as Catholic Sisters have always been about mission. Age and circumstances change, but the spirit of mission remains and manifests itself in new ways, like through this Days for Girls project. As we work at our meetings, we recognize our connection to girls everywhere. It gives us a new way to do what we’ve always done: help to heal, to instruct, to bless, to encourage, and above all to know we are involved in a mission of mercy. Sharing that with some of our high schoolers and seeing them embrace the opportunity to serve was very meaningful for us.”

The high school girls in attendance felt similarly grateful for sharing the service opportunity with the Sisters. Emily Auld, a senior at Albertus Magnus High School, shared, “Being at the convent is such an amazing experience. I love it every time I come -- The Sisters are so open and hospitable. I’ve been to Dominican Convent for school retreats in the past, but this was the first time I really got to talk and connect deeply with a group of Sisters. Learning about the issue behind the Days for Girls project was a complete surprise to me—it’s not something that people really talk much about. But it needs to be talked about. I think this project is amazing! I felt such a sense of community and purpose that night. It really brings women together across the world.”

Since they began volunteering in February, the Sparkill community has helped to make some 100 kits that were distributed in needy villages in Haiti and Uganda. “That’s 100 individual lives that have been made a little easier, a little more comfortable,” said Kara Donsky. This July, 37 kits were sent to Duval Roche, Haiti with a group of Dominican Sisters who run a summer camp there each year, bringing the project that much closer to home for the Sparkill congregation. With a Congregational Goal committing them to “… a ministry for justice wherein [they] focus on the enablement of the poor, of the powerless, of the oppressed, and of the spiritually deprived people of our times,” it is easy to see why the Days for Girls project has been so whole-heartedly embraced by the Dominican Sisters of Sparkill.

The Evening of Service not only taught more people about this women’s rights issue and the Days for Girls project, but also fostered connections between the Sisters and lay members of the community and created huge amounts of finished work for future hygiene kits. It was a wonderful success, and the Sparkill community as well as the students hope to continue sharing this service project together.
Left: Volunteers assembling the completed kits. Center: Albertus Magnus HS students pose for a photo with their Campus Minister, Sr. Nancy Richter, OP. Right: Albertus students enjoying the evening at Dominican Convent.

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**Media Notes:**
Images/interviews available upon request. Please email our Communications Office or call 845.359.4179. To contact the Northern NJ Chapter of Days for Girls, email dumontnj@daysforgirls.org or visit www.daysforgirls.org.