

NAZARETH GAZETTE

A biannual Nazareth School Alumni Newsletter - Covering topics related to Nazareth School; students, faculty and alumni

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A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTRESS

NAZARETH SCHOOL IN THE LAST FEW YEARS

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Ms. Violet Nekesa Makokha
Directress of Nazareth School

Peace be with you all!

It is gratifying to be on the Mission for Christ and humanity. As the Directress of Nazareth School, I count myself blessed to have come to Nazareth School at a time like this: God's own time. In this mission we have received Blessings upon Blessings, we cannot take it for granted. Living and embracing the Vision, Mission and Objectives of Nazareth School has given me hope and desire to see Nazareth School move on to higher heights with all its stakeholders, and more importantly, with all of you Nazareth School alumnae embracing sisterhood as you have always done.

Nazareth School Expansion Project is something that will see the school acquire a new look. At the completion of it, we shall all be proud of our achievements as Nazareth School community. This calls for a lot of effort and unity of purpose which I would like to invite us all to embrace.

I end with Chinua Achebe's words of wisdom, "He who has people is richer than he who has money" Nazareth School is richer because it has people! Arise, let us move Nazareth School to higher heights!

God Bless You,
God Bless Nazareth School,
God Bless Ethiopia
Ms. Violet Nekesa Makokha
DHM



From 2007 through 2016, the Society of the Daughters of the Heart of Mary (DHM) Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena for 7 years and then to the De La Salle Brothers for 3 years. After 10 years of absence, the DHM took over the administration of Nazareth School in 2016, with the appointment of Sister Violet Makokha as the new school Director. With her leadership, the school made many visible and non visible improvements to sustain the school.

A 5-year strategic plan – 'Towards excellence' - was developed; audit was conducted to identify gaps. The audit expense was financed by the alumnae. With the help of the school alumnae, Wisdom Consult PLC was invited to assess the institution. It was a great success!

Wisdom Consult PLC supported the development of Job descriptions for all job positions in the school, Job specifications, HR Manual, Financial Manual, and Code of Conduct. Findings and Recommendations of Wisdom Consult PLC and of the auditors, resulted in many reforms.

First thing first, the school was renovated giving it a new, fresh and inviting look.

KEY ACTIONS TAKEN BY NAZARETH SCHOOL

Hiring of qualified teachers

Hiring of an academic director to focus on academic department of the school

Restructuring of the Board of Trustees to include the alumnae and other external members

Re-orientation of the Student Council; focusing on the training and empowerment of young leaders

Introduced a retreat for teachers (by tightening the budget) to provide teachers' motivation.

Introduced a lunch program for teachers - at a subsidized prices

More emphasis given to extra curriculum activities; club days were introduced to showcase the different activities.

Introduced an academic student council providing academic support to students including those including those with plans to attend universities overseas

Installed observation cameras throughout the school, for effective and timely monitoring of teaching and the learning process within the school

On the occasion of Nazareth School @ 65, an Expansion Project was launched and in January 2019 the foundation stone to Ms. Loiseau Block was blessed and laid



SAFETY FIRST

The Pandemic was a wakeup call for the school; it caught everyone by surprise. On April 12th, the school IT department created a School Telegram channel that teachers could use to contact students. Thereafter, on April 19th, the school launched an e-learning platform. The backbone of the online learning platform is Dr. Rahel Bekele, Nazareth School alumna who works tirelessly with the help of Student Council members, Bezawit Tesfaye and Luba Getnet to support the school with this project during these hard times.

Nazareth Gazette Editor Group

- Sister Violet Nekesa Makokha - Directress
- Rachel Berhane - Alumni
- Hossana Agedew – Alumni
- Helen Tedla Teshome – Alumni
- Degete Yoseph Bushen – Alumni
- Aida Solomon – Alumni

Congratulations to Nebiat, Class of 2020, on receiving a full scholarship from the prestigious University of Pennsylvania. Nebiat has been a top student in her class throughout her studies. She was a Scout and a member of the Student Council, responsible among other activities, to oversee different club activities and organize club days on the last Friday of every month. Nebiat attributes the secrets to her success to God's grace and the support of her parents. She says, "Being consistent, disciplined, and focused, and at the end of the day, working hard indeed pays off." Nebiat mentions that she learned to do her best at an early age, influenced by a household of "hard-working people". Nebiat says: "Nazareth school is a second home for me; my friends, teachers and all other faculty members are my second family. It is there where most of my memories lie and where my personality was greatly shaped."



NEBIAT,
CLASS OF
2020,



REKIK
ABAINEH

Recently, Bole Ethiopian Cuisine, restaurant owned by Nazareth School Alumna, Rekik Abaineh and her husband Solomon Hailie in St. Paul, MN, was burned down as a result of fires set off in the protests and demonstrations following the death of George Floyd.

Although losing their life's work in this manner was painful, they understood what was unfolding in the United States, was of much greater importance. Racial injustice and police brutality in the United States has been a problem for centuries, and it can be discouraging to witness such blatant acts of violence towards people of color. Rekik stated, 'It hurts to understand the reality of the nation, and then worry about what could potentially happen to my own children, or my husband. In this sense, I knew that losing my business was a chance for me to build connections with my community, reestablish my goals, and push for unity and integration in ways I had not before.'



HIRUTH
(MIMI) LETTA

Hirut (Mimi) Letta, also another alumna was in the process of reopening her business, Mimi's Beauty Salon in the midst of covid-19 pandemic, when it was looted and destroyed by fire damage following the death of George Floyd.

SCHOOL EXPANSION PROJECT



THE BIGGEST PROJECT. FOCUSES ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW BUILDING

NS Expansion Project is an ambitious project to be achieved in 6 phases. First phase: The biggest project, focuses on the construction of a new building – Ms. Loiseau Block, named after Ms. Rahel Loiseau, the founder and the first Directress (1953-1967) of NS who arrived from France in 1952 with the intention of opening a school for girls that embodies excellence. We are excited, the 1st phase has already begun with the laying of the foundation stone in January 2019. The campaign started 5 years ago with Nazareth School 60th anniversary with the current level of student enrolment of 1,525 students, NS has large classrooms of 60 students per class. Ms. Loiseau Block will add more classes for the elementary grades, and reduce class sizes to about 40 students per class. The building will be a ground plus four levels, and is meant for Elementary School from Grade 1 to 8. It will reduce the class size to about 40 students per class. The building will include, a Computer lab, Library, music and language rooms, staff rooms, an open play area, offices and bathrooms.



Ms. Loiseau Block is being constructed by Geom. Luigi Varnero Imperes a Construzioni PLC, one of the best contractors in Ethiopia, the same construction company that completed St. Joseph's 21 Century

Building. Total cost of Ms. Loiseau block is estimated USD 1.94 million. From grants and donations NS managed to raise some 21M Birr (about USD 500,000 at current exchange rate) towards this project. In addition, during Nazareth School 60th Anniversary, the alumnae raised about 1.5 Million Birr, and on the occasion of Nazareth School 65th anniversary the alumni raised another 283,000 birr towards this project.

NS now appeals to its large alumni network to support fund raising efforts and ensure timely completion of Ms. Loiseau's block. Alumni support could link this worthwhile cause with Catholic organizations around the world or through alumni's direct financial support. Alumnae together, can make this expansion possible. Financial contribution could be sent directly to the school to its Commercial Bank of Ethiopia account.

How you can support?

Financial contribution could be sent to the school, to be deposited at its Commercial Bank of Ethiopia account. Please contact the school Director for more information.

Mentors give you
Perspective
Sponsors give you
Opportunities

Nazareth School (NS) Alumnae sponsoring students in need of financial support is not new. However, starting with the academic year 2010/2011, the Class of 1978 began a formalized High School Scholarship program for academically strong students who need financial support. The selection process is rigorous. Students come from government schools throughout Addis Abeba. Their academic performance is reviewed. Students also take NS' High school entrance exam, and finally interviewed by representatives of the alumnae and school administration. The first scholarship recipients graduated from NS in 2014, and went on to study Software Engineering and Accounting, respectively, at Addis Ababa University. Both students did well, earned their Bachelor Degrees, and were the pride and joy of their respective families. Since graduating, the Software Engineer has been engaged in Artificial Intelligence development projects that have been paving the way for Africa's tech to rise and is currently working as a Senior Software Engineer with a company that strives to bring cutting edge technology to local applications in Addis Ababa. Class of 1978 is extremely proud of both its graduates!

The formal scholarship program has expanded over the years, with more alumnae groups participating every year. Today, NS reserves ten spots in 9th grade every year for the Alumnae Scholarship program! Annually, in average about 50 girls compete for the 10 spots, and around 18 Alumnae Groups ranging from Class of 1971 through Class of 2006 have participated in this worthwhile, incredibly rewarding, and life changing, scholarship program.

If you are interested to participate in the scholarship program starting September/October 2020, contact the school by September 25th, 2020.



**IF YOU EDUCATE A GIRL, YOU
EDUCATE A NATION. -African Proverb**

**The Annual Sponsorship Drive will be
August 15 - September 25th, 2020.**

For scholarship program contact:

Sister Violet Nekesa Makokha, Director: makokhaviolet@yahoo.com

Helen Tedla Teshome, Alumni: helentteshome@yahoo.com

**IN MEMORIAM- VIRGINIA
BERNICE TOWNER,
DHM, 102**



Nazareth School and the Alumni Association celebrates the life of Ms. Virginia Bernice Towner who recently passed away.

Ms. Virginia Bernice Towner, DHM, died on Thursday, June 11, 2020, at the age of 102 years. Her life was given to the service of God's purpose as a Daughter of the Heart of Mary for the past 56 years. Ms. Towner earned a Bachelor's Degree in Social Science and Physical Education from Winona State College in Minnesota, and a Master's Degree in Education and Psychology from Marquette University in Milwaukee, WI.

Ms. Towner held several teaching and leadership positions; including as the High School Principal of Nazareth School for eight years. Nazareth School will always remember Ms. Towner for her dedication and service to girls' quality education.



**Ms. FRANCES BREEN
DIRECTRESS OF NAZARETH
SCHOOL 1973- 1985 WITH
F ACUIL T Y**



**CLASS OF 1990 NAZARETH
GIRLS
IN 5TH GRADE**



FORMER & CURRENT TEACHERS

Q&A with Nazareth School Alumni

Dr. Timnit Gebru is a research scientist in AI, a role model and an advocate for diversity in technology. She is the co-founder of Blacks in AI and technical co-lead of Google's Ethical AI team.



What inspired you to pursue the field of Artificial Intelligence?

I took a very roundabout path. My father was an electrical engineer and my sisters studied that as well. So I didn't really think much about it, I decided to study electrical engineering, I enjoyed Math and Physics. I then worked at Apple on circuit design, and came back to graduate school. Worked more in circuits/device physics, then got interested in optics, then the image processing part, took a class then liked computer vision. Finally I finished my PhD in computer vision (I had dropped out and come back). Then towards the end I got alarmed by the manner in which the technology was used and also the lack of representation of Black people when I go to international academic conferences. So I veered more into fairness, ethics etc. of the technology.

How would you describe AI? What do people need to understand about the fundamentals and purpose of AI?

I would say that AI is a field that tries to work on giving machines the capability to understand some aspects of the world. So language translation tries to create technology that can translate one language to another, computer vision tries to have machines understand what is in imagery etc. I would have probably said something different before but right now I would

like people to understand the pros and cons of this technology and how many times, when technology is only funded/incentivized by powerful entities it doesn't help most people--it does the opposite. So I would like to see technology that is mostly funded by efforts to improve education, health etc. rather than (e.g.) the military.

During your doctoral studies you co-founded Blacks in AI, tell us about the mission of your organization?

Our organization seeks to increase the representation of Black researchers and practitioners in the field of AI (broadly defined). We do this through having representation at conferences, mentorship, other network building activities and advocacy.

How do you see AI as a growing profession for women?

Women have always played a pivotal role in computing in general but as the profession gets more lucrative, the work of women starts to get minimized and eventually they get replaced by men. I'm seeing that with works related to fairness, ethics etc. in AI that many women have worked on but now powerful men are starting to step in and eclipse.

For Nazareth students or graduates that are thinking of going into the field of AI, where should they start and what guidance do you have for them?

I think they can take classes, look at websites like fast.ai, and have some fundamentals like programming and statistics and probability etc. But also having an accurate understanding of history, power dynamics etc. is very important. I would recommend reading African historians, African American studies, gender studies etc. Because a lot of the history we have learned is extremely Eurocentric and inaccurate. Technology is often a tool of domination and surveillance (e.g., was used in that manner heavily during apartheid, civil rights movement, now) so it's important to understand this dynamics to ensure that we don't negatively affect our own people in the quest to work on this technology.

What is one book that has helped you in your personal or professional life that you would recommend?

Race after technology by Ruha Benjamin



What are three things you enjoy doing during your down time?

Dance, play piano, run.

And lastly in the spirit of togetherness, what is your advice for this community of women including Nazareth alumni, students and faculty, on how we can uplift each other as well as contribute to social change as you have addressing issues of social disparities and inequality?

I think it's what I said above. Question what you are taught. Try to learn a representation of history that is not so Euro-centric that places Africans as savages. Try to understand how colonialism is still alive and how that dynamics works through everything including technology. It's that awakening and that learning that allows us to work on addressing systemic injustices.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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