



Our Life as Mission

NEWS FROM MARTHA
LEADERSHIP TEAM

*Sisters
of
St. Martha*

Issue 2
May 2020

“Standing together in undaunted hope”



A PRAYER FOR NOVA SCOTIA

The prayers of the Sisters of St. Martha, Antigonish NS are with all who are affected by the tragic events in Cumberland-Colchester and surrounding areas. There are no adequate words that can express our collective sorrow.



CSM Secretary and Receptionist, Sarah ten Brinke has created a sign of solidarity

As you journey through loss, grief, and pain may you be comforted by those who carry you and your intentions to a compassionate God.

We send a spiritual hug letting you know that you are not alone, that we are indeed together and take seriously our commitment to hold you in prayer for many months to come.

As I begin to write a few words from the new norm of my working space at Xavier Community, I am remembering the words which I shared in my Lenten Letter to Sisters and Associates, from the prophet Micah:

All God asks of us is to act justly, to love tenderly, (mercifully) and to walk humbly with God.

As we continue to live in this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, and live through the soul sadness of the senseless mass shootings in Cumberland-Colchester community and the tragedy of the CAF's helicopter crash, killing 6 Canadian heroes, these words from Micah are like a comfort when we feel at a loss with how to be or act at this time in our history.

We at Xavier Community pray each day for our CSM staff who faithfully connect with us and work safely from home. We have continual prayers of thanksgiving for

the Shannex Management and Staff and their dedicated commitment to our Sisters and all Residents living at Parkland Antigonish. We remember the front-line workers at the RK MacDonald Nursing Home and St. Martha's Regional Hospital who leave the safety of their homes each day to care for those more vulnerable. We remember the needs as well of all those individuals who quietly go about packing groceries, delivering medications, or newspapers and do what is needed to keep the country running. We are more together today even in our isolation.



Sr. Brendalee Boisvert, the Congregation Leader, at her home office

Our CSM Direction Statement inviting us to *dare to stand in undaunted hope*, have never been more challenging and more prophetic. In this issue of *Our Life as Mission*, you will receive a glimpse of many ways we as Marthas are responding to the needs of the time.

Our best words are simply, thank you, thank you, thank you.

Sr. Brendalee Boisvert, Congregation Leader

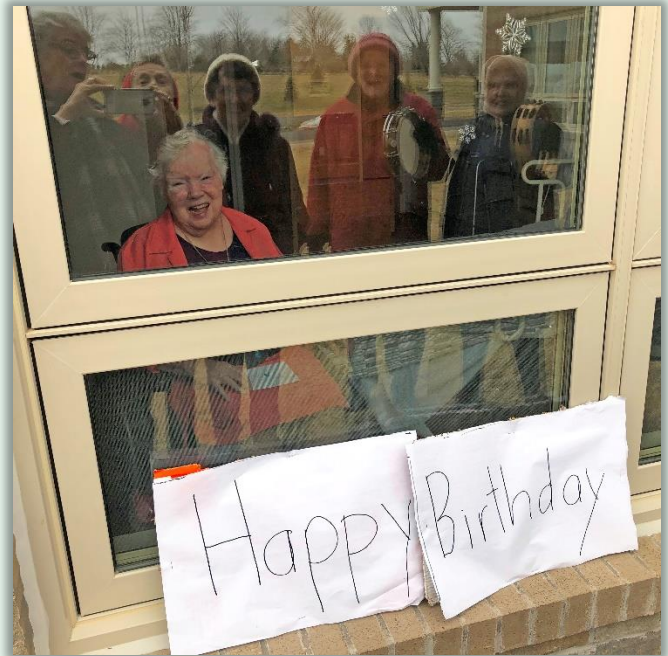
We are called to be women of the dawn, facing the darkness that surrounds us today, the experience of pain and death. We, as believers run with love to announce the Resurrection.
(LCWR quote)

PARKLAND ANTIGONISH DURING THE PANDEMIC

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, Parkland Antigonish, a home to the majority of Marthas, is on lockdown until further notice. This means that all Sisters who live outside of Parkland Antigonish are unable to attend Mass, have meals, visit or stay over during this time.

The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Martha is deeply grateful to Management and Staff of Parkland Antigonish for all their dedication, commitment and loving care as they work together to keep the residents safe during the pandemic.

While observing social distancing rules, Sisters are visiting those inside 'through the glass', singing to them, celebrating birthdays, just making themselves present to one another. On Holy Thursday, the Congregation Leader, Sr. Brendalee Boisvert extended Easter greetings to the Sisters and residents at Parkland Antigonish using camera broadcasted to all TV's in the house!



Sr. Shirley Bruce's birthday celebrations 'through the glass'

WORKING FROM HOME

Mount Carmel Administration Centre has been closed since March 20, 2020. The General Leadership Team and Staff are all working from home.



Sr. Claire MacNeil, Ministry of Spirituality

Sisters are blessed to have the technology they need to keep connected during this time. Many of the scheduled meetings have moved to conference calls or video calls and there are almost daily information exchanges via email.

Marthas are able to continue some ministries during the lockdown, such as Ministry of Spirituality. The Centering Prayer group is maintaining physical distancing during these troubled times. Each member of this strong and growing prayer community, besides honoring their commitment to Centering twice a day, tries to practice Centering Prayer on the dates and time there would have been a meeting. In that way, they are still together in prayer. Sr. Claire MacNeil also continues the ministry of Spiritual Direction with several of her Directees on Skype or by phone. This seems to work well for some people, but they look forward to when they can again meet in person.

IN SUPPORT OF THE FRONT-LINE WORKERS

On April 29, The Leadership Team of the Sisters of St. Martha showed up first in front of the building of St. Martha's Regional Hospital and, later, RK MacDonald Nursing Home. Sisters were playing trumpet, holding signs and ringing bells to show their deep appreciation of workers in both institutions.



We want to say thank you to Managers, Physicians, Staff and all those who leave the safety of their homes each day to protect those needing care at St. Martha's Regional Hospital and the RK MacDonald Nursing Home.

Your dedicated care and attention to safe practices have kept us all safe from COVID-19. We want you to know that we are aware that you are here each day and on behalf of the Congregation of St. Martha, we are so grateful.

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!



SUPPORTING EACH OTHER: *TOGETHER IN ISOLATION*



The new social reality of distancing and isolation is not easy for anyone. To keep Sisters connected in a unique way, CSM started a new weekly publication.



Together in Isolation newsletter has been coming out for the last 5 weeks as a response to the Covid-19 reality. It features updates from all Martha communities. Marthas send their 'pandemic' stories, reflections, poems and photos to the CSM communications office. These submissions are formatted into a two-page newsletter and sent out to all Sister communities on a weekly basis. It has become quite popular and the submissions keep coming!

A Spring Reflection from Julia Townsend, Martha Associates Director

About two weeks ago, I enjoyed an old episode of “Touched by an Angel”, a favorite series of mine which ran from September 1994 to April 2003. I have all nine seasons and, every now and then, I watch an episode or two. There was a quote in that last episode that has resurfaced in my mind over the past two weeks: **“To be alive in such an age”**. I decided to look it up, and discovered it is from a famous poet, Walt Whitman. The whole quote reads like this:



To be alive in such an age, when miracles are everywhere and every inch of common air throbs a tremendous prophecy, of greater marvels yet to be.

~ Walt Whitman

As I was pondering the quote, I wondered how it connected with the times we are currently living in. It is Spring of 2020, the world is battling an unseen enemy, a virus, which has infected our world and unleashed a Pandemic! We must stay at home, we cannot gather or hug, or chat over a good cup of hot tea!! We now wear masks out in public, if we go out at all, such as to the grocery store. Going for a walk is like entering a hamster maze, crisscrossing the streets so as not to pass each other! We attend Mass online or on TV! It has been a very challenging and painful time for all of us. Add to that the unthinkable events which occurred in our beautiful province of Nova Scotia recently, it has been unbearable! **“To be alive in such an age.....”**



“When miracles are everywhere.....” And yet, the miracles are everywhere! The sun has continued to rise, the little crocuses are poking happily up from the ground to spread color and encourage smiles! People are waving to each other across the streets as they walk, acknowledging that **“common throb”** of what we are all feeling! *Continued on the next page.*

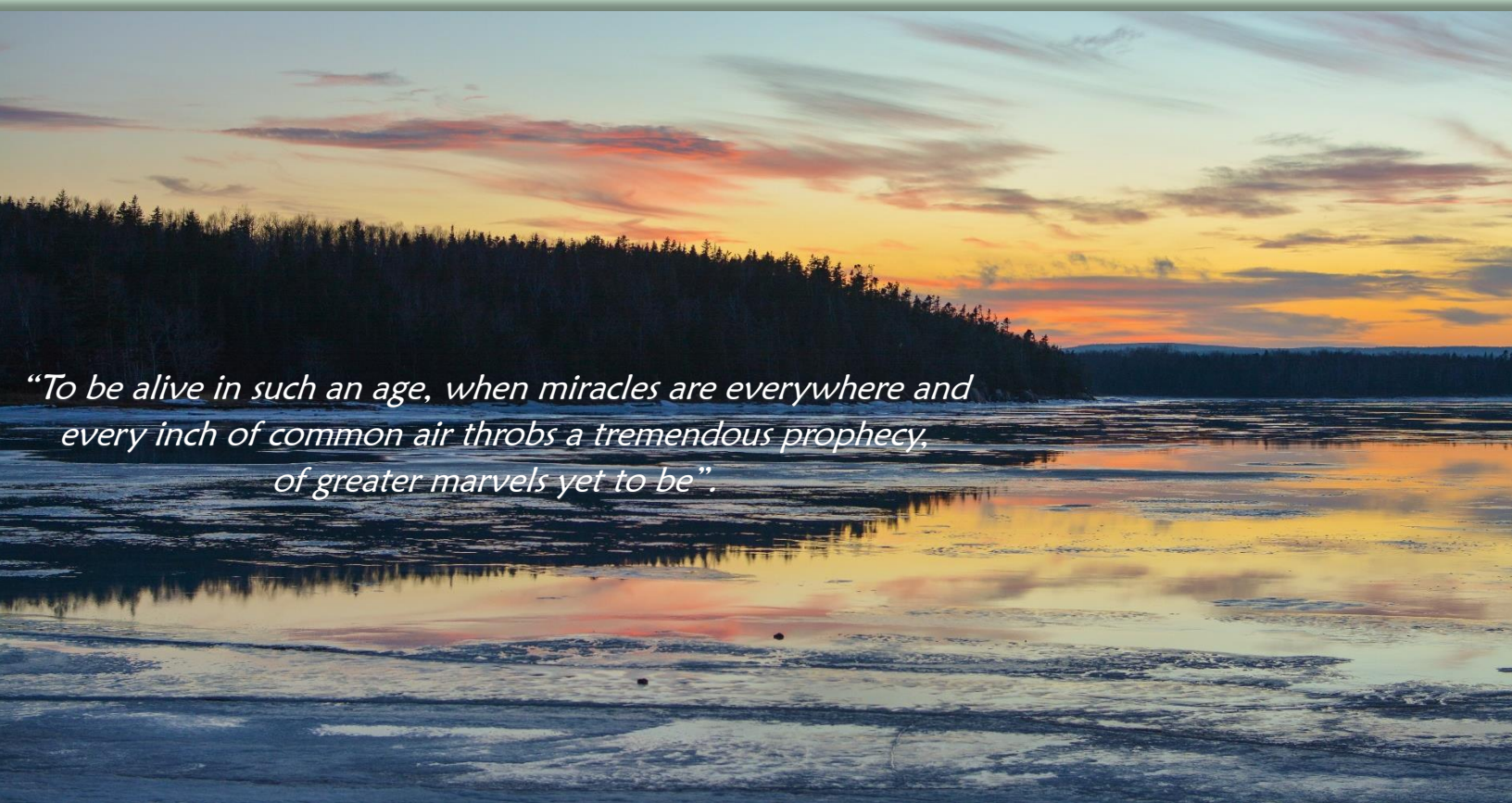
People caring for people, making phone calls or using social media to check in on each other, ensuring everyone has what they need; musical kitchen parties online to lift our spirits for a time; spring flowers and rainbows made by children, candles and flags, proudly hung in windows, a hopeful sign of brighter days ahead; Women and Men on the front lines caring for our health and essential needs in life; Political and Spiritual Leaders guiding us and supporting us each day, providing human faces of calm and strength to help us move forward!

And everywhere, prayer.... time for personal prayer and reflection, and time for global prayer all around our world! Even Mother Earth has had a reprieve from the usual insults we unleash on her!”to be alive in such an age, where miracles are everywhere”.

The very real problems of our world still exist and will be there to be worked on after this pandemic and time of grief has passed. I believe it would be “**tremendous prophecy**” to recall how we came together to work for the common good of all, to remember that we are more than Canadian, American, British, etc. We are all global citizens!

And, in the middle of it all, is our God! God’s love is reaching out to us all, allowing us the freedom to cry, while letting us know we are not alone. The love and care we show to each other is God’s way of passing on light, love, hope and peace. That is an “infection” we all want! It is the source of “**greater marvels yet to be**”.

By Julia Townsend, Martha Associates Director



“To be alive in such an age, when miracles are everywhere and every inch of common air throbs a tremendous prophecy, of greater marvels yet to be”.

DID YOU KNOW?

CSM FACTS

The Sisters of St. Martha have been involved in working for good affordable housing for persons living on low income for decades. Their collaboration with Antigonish Affordable Housing Society (AAHS) is enhanced by the 2019 Chapter Direction Statement:



“we desire to bring a contemplative and compassionate heart to our fractured world”.

The AAHS envisions having enough environmentally, socially and financially sustainable, community-supported affordable housing available to residents of Antigonish Town and County who are living on low incomes. The integral parts of AAHS social sustainability pillar are Community Room, Community Navigator and a Tenant Advisory Group, all fostering social support for and among the tenants.

Several Marthas worked with the first Society in Antigonish, NS in early 2000s to offer affordable housing for people who are vulnerable socially, environmentally and financially, living in poverty or on low income. When the organization became active once more around 2015, the Sisters of St. Martha provided basic funds for capital operations. The Provincial and Federal governments, Municipalities of Antigonish Town and County, AVIVA Award and other private funders followed.

In 2018, the AAHS celebrated the official opening of Phase 2 of Riverside Estates, its multi-family complex on Hope Lane. Phase 2 includes 10 new affordable rental units—adding to the four units in Phase 1 which opened in 2017—and a Community Room. Phase 3 is now being planned for 10 new units.



Riverside Estates, affordable housing supported by the local community

Sr. Marion Sheridan, CSM, sat on the AAHS planning committee and is an active Member of the Board. It has definitely been a working board, never ceasing its fundraising efforts! Throughout the year, Sr. Rosaline Tynski collects recycling items to add to the AAHS funds. CSM continues to financially sponsor AAHS and helps in other ways. For instance, when Bethany Motherhouse closed, the Sisters donated furniture for the Community Room.



Phase 2 Open House

NOTICE

In the coming months, the Society will be auctioning donated Bethany Motherhouse Chapel stained glass pieces through the AAHS Facebook page.



A LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER FROM THE MARTHA JUSTICE MINISTRY

Over the past several weeks, we have witnessed our local, provincial and federal governments make decisions for our collective wellbeing that just a few months ago may not have seemed possible. The Martha Justice Ministry sent the following letter to the Canadian government to share our hope that the far reaching and decisive approach taken during the pandemic will spur on systemic changes that will centre the human rights and dignity of all people in Canada, particularly those experiencing poverty, violence and discrimination.

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

We are writing today to thank you for the steps you and our government have taken throughout the COVID-19 crisis to make swift, thoughtful and impactful decisions that are helping to protect communities across Canada and flatten the curve of this pandemic. We cannot imagine the pressure and work required of decision makers across Canada at this time.

It has been comforting and reassuring to see all parties approaching this crisis with respect for one another and a common commitment to supporting those who will be hit hardest by this pandemic — both by the disease itself and the impact it has on society as a whole.

In so many ways, this unprecedented moment is peeling back the layers of our everyday lives to show us what is at the heart of our lives together as communities. When our daily, taken-for-granted rituals and lifestyles are put on hold, we begin to see the fragility of the systems we depend on for survival. Very quickly, we can see we are more alike than we are different.

Those who can afford more insulation from crisis are now coming face-to-face with new realities. But for too many Canadians, the realities surfaced by this crisis are not new — insecurity (economic and social), isolation, homelessness, and no means to plan beyond the day-to-day. These are everyday realities for those already disproportionately impacted by systemic injustices, including Indigenous peoples, racialized peoples, newcomers, and those living on the economic margins.

We hope this moment in history is opening the eyes and hearts of Canadians to those who call for social and economic justice each and every day. We hope that, in this moment, we are growing in our capacity to care for one another.

When we all slowly begin to rise out of this moment of pause that COVID-19 has created, we will be faced with many new questions about how we move forward — what elements of our humanity and compassion, unveiled during this crisis, will we have the courage to maintain?



Continued on the next page

A LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER *continued*



Will we continue to offer economic supports for individuals, increased wages and just compensation for frontline workers? Will we continue to see and value the inherent dignity of people and their contributions to our collective survival? Will we have the foresight to strengthen the supports essential for the long-term stability of all persons — a liveable wage or income assistance, health care, and affordable housing?

We know our government can make bold and far-reaching decisions for our collective survival, particularly for those most vulnerable in Canada, both quickly and thoughtfully. We now have new tools and approaches to craft a future for Canada in which **NO ONE WILL BE LEFT BEHIND** — a call that is foundational to the United Nation's Agenda 2030 to which Canada is committed and can play a leading role.

We know as Canadians we have the ability to make decisions that are often thought impossible. And we know these decisions mean all of us will be even more resilient, more prepared, and more able to weather storms like this in future — whether it be the climate crisis, natural disasters or future pandemics.

We pray the love, compassion and collective care demonstrated by our governments, businesses, organizations, communities and individuals across Canada will be the new norm for how we organize our lives in this country, and that we will see these approaches as critical, rather than incompatible, to the vibrancy of our economy.

We hope this experience will continue to foster the foresight and courage within you and our government to make decisions that uphold the dignity of all Canadians. We would appreciate any response you may be able to provide.
Sincerely,

*The Martha Justice Ministry, Core Group
Sisters of St. Martha, Antigonish*

support

dignity

care



ANTIGONISH POVERTY REDUCTION COALITION CONTINUES ITS WORK

Despite the limitations of physical distancing, the Antigonish Poverty Reduction Coalition (APRC) is pushing forward to advocate for the eradication of poverty locally, provincially and federally.

Sister Marion Sheridan continues to represent the Martha Justice Ministry on the APRC, which is currently holding its meetings virtually. The group is in the midst of drafting letters to provincial and federal government officials to advocate for the development of a Guaranteed Annual Income to ensure that every Canadian has the opportunity for safety, security and health at all times. The APRC is inspired by a group of senators that recently submitted a letter to government in support of a minimum basic income. You can read the letter here: <https://ubiworks.ca/50senators/>

Antigonish Poverty Reduction Coalition



MARTHA NEW GROWERS UPDATE

Martha New Growers Program has been affected by the restrictions related to COVID-19 pandemic. With great sadness, CSM decided to limit the New Growers to one team.

At the time the decision had to be made, Alaa and Osama were still waiting for their seeds to be shipped, while Olivia and Andrew had seedlings ready to transplant. In consequence, Alaa and Osama withdrew from the program.

Olivia and Andrew have been working hard on their garden and are now in a position that they have produce to sell. They developed a marketing strategy that is in keeping with the Nova Scotia Provincial Guidelines for market gardeners to ensure the safe selling of produce during the Covid-19 pandemic. They are connecting with customers online and arranging for a contact free delivery of the vegetables.



Olivia working hard in the greenhouse



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CSM MISSION

We, Sisters of St. Martha, inspired by God's graciousness, hear, embrace and respond to the cry for Gospel hospitality.