



Welcome to the Martha Storyboards Virtual Albums!

*The Martha Storyboards present **highlights** of the Martha Story. For additional historical information, consult James Cameron, *And Martha Served* (2000): [And Martha Served.pdf](#)*

*The stained-glass motifs and vibrant colours of the Storyboards are inspired by the Bethany Chapel Windows [Rambusch of Canada] now located in the **Heritage Gallery**, Parkland*

*Except when noted, historical photographs on the Storyboards have been scanned from originals in the **CSM Archives, Bethany Resource Centre**. Photographs on the Storyboards were edited to fit into the stained-glass designs. The original photographs, with full descriptions, are reproduced in the Storyboards Albums. Enjoy!*

*When professed, Sisters chose a **religious name**. In 1967, Marthas could retain their religious name or revert to their baptismal name and surname. The Albums identify Sisters by both their religious and secular names.*

*The **Notes** suggest additional resources that are readily accessible online – many more are available at your local library. Consult the Martha website for information on **current programs and activities**.*

From Catechisms to Labyrinth: Martha Ministry of Spirituality

Originally the Marthas' Ministry of Spirituality was focused on religious education. The aim was to teach Catholic doctrine to prepare children for the sacraments.

Beginning in 1933, the Marthas stationed in Lethbridge offered religious vacation schools -usually 1 to 2 weeks- in several prairie settlements. By 1953, there were Martha vacation schools in 11 rural parishes, attended by 1,325 children. The Antigonish Marthas also adopted this model: between 1950 and 1960, the Marthas taught religion to 18,000 children in summer schools in the Diocese.



In 1936, the Marthas introduced a Catechism course for children in the surrounding rural communities. A total of 84 lessons were distributed from the Bethany Motherhouse that first year, starting a practice that continued until the 1960s.



Sister preparing Catechism lessons, 1941

Retreats were incredibly popular. Starting in 1949, the Marthas opened several retreat houses throughout Nova Scotia and Canada to provide accommodation and services to retreatants.

In 1954, the Fatima Retreat House (Seabright) hosted 6 retreats with 120 attendees, and the newly opened Villa Madonna (Bras d'Or) held 34 retreats with 586 participants: numbers that only increased over the years.

Despite this, the Marthas only charged enough to recover costs, and often offered spaces per gratis as "no one is prevented from making a retreat because of inability to cover this cost".



Arranged and often sponsored by the Marthas, retreats were typically one to three days where attendees would withdraw to dedicated houses for theological and spiritual instruction and quiet, reflective contemplation.

On 30 July 1929, 30 girls participated in the first Martha retreat, hosted at St. Andrew's Convent. Retreats were intended for all ages, classes, and lifestyles, such as "married or single women, high school girls, businesswomen, widows, and converts."



Fatima Retreat House, Seabright Rd, Antigonish



Drawing on their expertise in music, the Marthas brought spirituality to the community through liturgical and inspirational song.

One way this was accomplished was by organizing children's choirs to provide music for local Masses.

The Marthas also founded their own choir of Sisters and performed concerts that doubled as fundraisers. On 26 January 1965, they performed their first public concert "Let There be Music" and successfully raised \$1,489 for charity.



Then in 2001, the *Marthas on a Mission* was formed. A small group of singing Sisters, they travelled across Canada fundraising for local causes and sharing their Martha values through song.

Martha Ministry of Spirituality: Religious Instruction

Wherever Sisters can be found there was, and continues to be, care and support for the spiritual development and wellbeing of those around them. In the beginning, this often took the form of religious education. Drawing on their experience as teachers, the Marthas ran vacation schools and created mail-in lessons to teach children about catechism, faith, and Catholic doctrine to prepare them for the sacraments.

Beginning in 1933, the Marthas stationed in Lethbridge offered religious vacation schools - usually 1 to 2 weeks- in several prairie settlements. By 1953, there were Martha vacation schools in 11 rural parishes, attended by 1325 children. The Antigonish Marthas also adopted this model: between 1950 and 1960, the Marthas taught religion to 18,000 children in summer schools in the Diocese.



Sisters Margaret Mary (Mary Wilhemina) Herve and Mary of Nazareth (Mary) MacDonald with summer school children at Grand Mira, Cape Breton, July 1953



Sisters Mary Colina (Jessie) MacDougall and Mary Roselina (Agnes) McMahon preparing Catechism lessons for the mail, Bethany, 1941.

In 1936, the first Catechism lessons were mailed from the Bethany Motherhouse to children in the surrounding rural communities. The Marthas created, mailed, and graded these lessons themselves, even sending out prizes for the best work. In that first year a total of 84 lessons were distributed, starting a practice that continued until the 1960s.

Retreats: Silence and Solitude

Due in part to the popular Lay Retreat Movement of the early 1900s, the Marthas began to arrange, sponsor, and host retreats for local women.

While retreats could be a week or longer, they usually ran over the weekend for just 1 to 3 days. Attendees withdrew to convents or dedicated houses for theological and spiritual instruction and quiet reflective contemplation.

On 30 July 1929, 30 girls attended the first Martha retreat, hosted at the Sisters' convent in St. Andrew's. Retreats catered to all ages, classes, and lifestyles such as "*married or single women, high school girls, businesswomen, widows, and converts*".

<u>RETREAT SCHEDULE</u>	
<u>High School Girls</u>	
Saturday	7.00- Rise
	7.30- Morning Prayers
	8.15- Breakfast
	9.00- Litany of the Sacred Heart & Act of Consecration.
	9.30- Conference
	10.00- Confessions or Spiritual Reading
	10.30- Walk on the Grounds
	11.00- Conference
	11.50- Examination of Conscience
	12.00- Dinner
	12.30- Visit to the Blessed Sacrament Rest Period or walk on the Grounds -Silence
	2.00- Stations of the Cross -in private, outside.
	2.50- Taking of Group Picture
	3.00- Conference
	3.45- Spiritual Reading
	4.15- Rosary & Visit to the Blessed Sacrament
	5.30- Conference
	6.00- Supper
	7.00- Choir Practise
	7.30- Conference, Benediction - Confessions
	9.30- Lights Out.
<u>Sunday Afternoon:</u>	
	1.15- Conference
	2.00- Living Rosary
	2.15- Holy Hour
	3.15- Close of Retreat

Retreat Schedule for Fatima House [between 1950-1960]

Father A.A. Johnston and unidentified Sister with participants of the Retreat for Single Girls, Fatima Retreat House, Seabright Rd, 21-23 July 1950. From album, Fatima Retreat House.



*Retreat Master:
The Reverend A.A. Johnston*

FIFTH RETREAT
JULY 21-23, 1950
SINGLE GIRLS

RETREATANTS

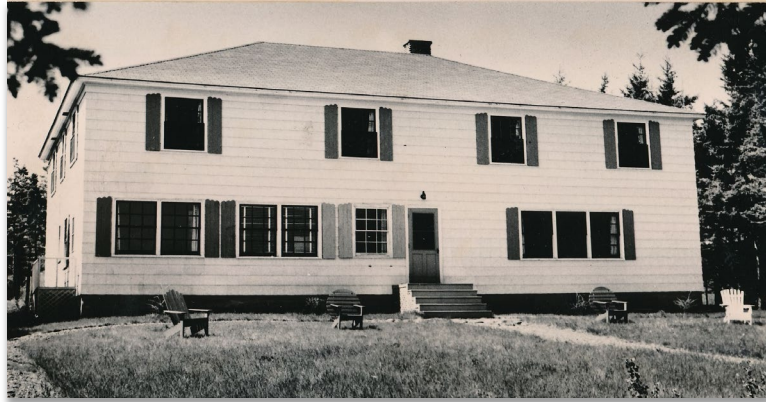
- | | |
|------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Aileen MacNeil | St. Andrews |
| 2. Monica Meade | Antigonish |
| 3. Theresa O'Callaghan | Sydney |
| 4. Mary Fraser | St. Andrews |
| 5. Geraldine McDonald | Antigonish |
| 6. Alice McKenna | Antigonish |
| 7. Remegius MacDonald | St. Andrews |
| 8. Mary MacDonald | Nt. Riverside |
| 9. Betty MacDougall | Antigonish |
| 10. Theresa McIsaac | Antigonish |
| 11. Mary C. Mason | R. R. #3 |
| 12. Catherine Mason | North Grant |
| 13. Jean MacDonald | Antigonish |
| 14. Margaret Cleary | Antigonish |
| 15. Pauline Cormier | Sydney |
| 16. Miriam Smith | Antigonish |
| 17. Colina MacEachern | St. Andrews |
| 18. Catherine McDonald | Antigonish |
- *****

1957
 1958
 1951
 1952
 1953
 1956
 1955
 1954



Father A.A. Johnston and unidentified Sister with participants of the Retreat for Single Girls, Fatima Retreat House, Seabright Rd, 21-23 July 1950. Detail from album, Fatima Retreat House.

Retreats proved incredibly popular. Starting in 1949, the Marthas came to own and/or operate several retreat houses throughout Nova Scotia and mainland Canada to provide accommodation and services to both laity and priests.



Fatima Retreat House
Seabright Rd, Nova Scotia (1949-1962)



Diocesan Villa Madonna Retreat House
Bras d'Or, Nova Scotia (1954-1964)



Bethany Retreat Center
Antigonish, Nova Scotia (1972-2017)



Martha Retreat Centre
Lethbridge, Alberta (1974-2019)
While it is no longer operated by the Marthas, they still own the building and provide support through the Martha Retreat Centre Society where some Sisters also serve as Board Members.



Galilee Centre
Arnrior, Ontario (1976-1994)
Operated in collaboration with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate



Siena House
Kamloops, British Columbia (1984-1990)
Owned by Kamloops Diocese, operated by the Marthas

In 1954, the Fatima Retreat House hosted 6 retreats with 120 retreatants, and the newly opened Villa Madonna held 34 retreats with 586 participants: numbers that only increased over the following years.

D/400/5/20 case 492

CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF ST. MARTHA ARCHIVES

VILLA MADONNA RETREAT HOUSE

BRAS D'OR NOVA SCOTIA

Opened April 20, 1954

First Retreat Held May 7, 1954

RETREAT STATISTICS

YEAR	NUMBER OF RETREATS HELD	NUMBER OF RETREATANTS	AVERAGE FOR EACH RETREAT
From May to December - 1954	34	586	15.5
1955	48	821	16.8
1956	41	858	21.
1957	40	972	20.7
1958	42	1,040	24.
1959	40	838	20.9
1960	37	822	22.

Villa Madonna Retreat House Statistics for 1954-1960

Despite this, the Marthas only charged enough to recover their expenses, and often offered spaces *per gratis* as “no one is prevented from making a retreat because of inability to cover this cost”.

FOR THE INFORMATION OF RETREATANTS

Since the opening of Fatima Retreat House in 1949, no specific fee has been set down for retreatants.

But since we have been repeatedly asked what amount they should pay for a week-end retreat we now present the following information:

The average cost to Fatima Retreat House for a two-day retreat is \$9.59 per retreatant. This covers Dietary, Laundry, Housekeeping, Fuel, Electricity, Chapel Supplies and portion of the Retreat Master's fee.

It is to be definitely understood, of course, that no one is prevented from making a retreat because of inability to cover this cost. Yet it is expected that those in a position to do so will contribute what they can to meet it.

CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF ST. MARTHA ARCHIVES

Fatima Retreat House
July, 1955

Circular: fees, July 1955

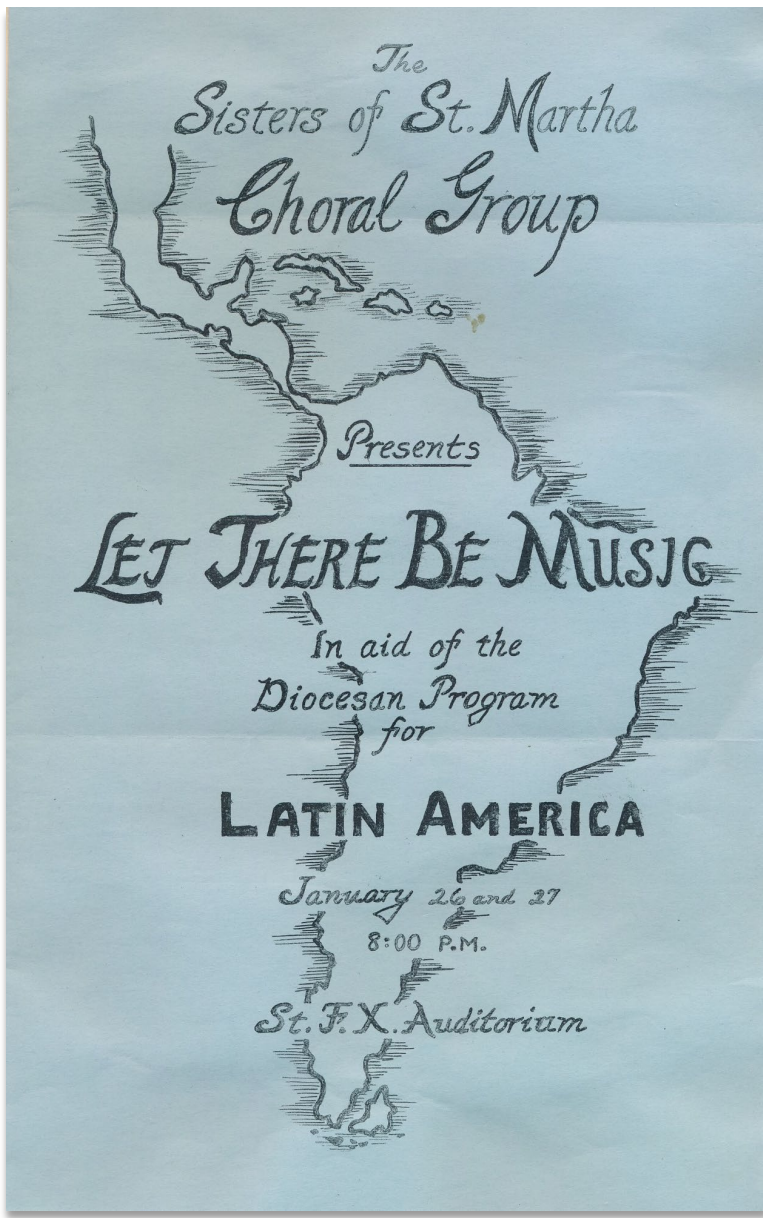
Spirituality in Song

Drawing on their expertise in music, the Marthas also brought spirituality to the community through liturgical and inspirational song.

One way this was accomplished was by organizing children's choirs to provide music for local Masses.



*Choir Director **Sister Margaret Mary (Mary Wilhemina) Herve** with Father George MacLean and the Bridgeport Boys choir, celebrating the Jubilee of the Immaculate Conception Church, Dominion, 1950*



Program, 1965

"Let There be Music"

The Marthas also had their own choral group, originally founded for the private entertainment of the Sisters. In the 1960s, however, they started hosting concerts for the community, which doubled as fundraisers.

Their first public concert "*Let There be Music*" was performed on 26 January 1965. The Sisters set up stage in the St. F.X. Auditorium and brought along everything from a guitar and ukulele to maracas and a bongo drum! Held in support of local priests from the diocese working in Latin America, the Sisters successfully raised \$1, 489.

Later that year, on 2 May 1965, the Marthas also made their first television appearance as the choir for Sunday Mass on CJTV.



- Sister Agnes Bernadette
- Sister Agnes Flavian
- Sister Alberta Marie
- Sister Alban Marie
- Sister Ann Catherine
- Sister Ann Ignatia
- Sister Ann Zita
- Sister Antonio Marie
- Sister Clare of Assisi
- Sister Edward Camilla
- Sister John Berchmans
- Sister John Regis
- Sister Kevin Marie
- Sister Maria Pius
- Sister Marie Pacelli
- Sister Marie Therese
- Sister Mary Augustine
- Sister Mary Colette
- Sister Mary Crescentia
- Sister Mary Daniel
- Sister Mary Dunstan
- Sister Mary Euphrasia
- Sister Mary Faustina
- Sister Mary Joanna
- Sister Mary Hilary
- Sister Mary Martha
- Sister Mary Shamus
- Sister Mary Shaun
- Sister Mary Stephanie
- Sister Martin de Porres
- Sister Michael Maria
- Sister Regina Therese



SISTER M. COLETTE

Excerpt from scrapbook, detailing "*Let There be Music*"



*Sisters of St. Martha Choral Group performing at St. F.X. University, 12 Jan. 1965.
Detail from scrapbook, illustrating *Let There be Music**



Marthas on a Mission, 2005.
Photo courtesy of CSM
Communications.

Seated (L to R): Sisters Jovita
MacPherson, Florence Kennedy

Standing (L t R):
Sisters Sandra (Marie) White, Debbie
Pike, Joanne O' Regan, Catherine Ann
(Catherine) MacGillivray, Donna
Brady, Elisabeth Fraser, Brendalee
Boisvert

Then in 2001, the *Marthas on a Mission* was formed. Following in the footsteps of the Bethany Choir, they were a small group of singing sisters that travelled across Canada, fundraising for local causes and sharing their Martha values through song.

“Come as You Are”: An Evolving Ministry

“You don’t have to pray at all, or pray well, or feel that you are close to God or even living the life you want to. Spiritual direction is a very simple process of putting out what you want and most deeply desire and having someone respond to that and help you to live from what you really want.”
Sister Mary Ann Scofield, RSM

After the Second Vatican Council and wider societal changes, the Marthas’ Ministry of Spirituality evolved and broadened.

The Marthas acknowledge that *“all are interconnected and interdependent, and a spiritual energy joins all living things”*. They aim to foster spiritual and personal growth through self-reflection, meditation, mindfulness, and a connection with nature.



On Bethany grounds one can find several gardens and walking trails, hermitages, and even a labyrinth.

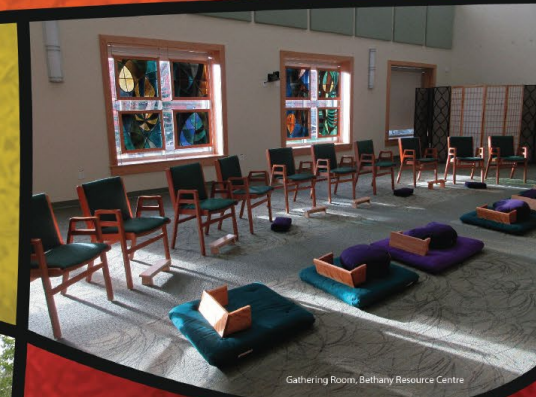
Welcome!



The Marthas have continued to nurture new expressions of spirituality in the 21st century.



Various programs such as Centering Prayer, Oasis days, retreats, workshops, and spiritual guidance are still offered and supported by the Sisters.



Gathering Room, Bethany Resource Centre

In town, the Martha spirit can be found at the Wellspring Centre on the St.F.X. campus, which serves as a welcoming interfaith space open to all students, faculty, and staff.



These spaces are for both the Sisters and the community, and they offer the opportunity to sit in stillness: to be surrounded by plants, animals, and birds, and to be immersed in the beauty of nature.



Wellspring Centre, St. F.X. University



“Come as You Are”: An Evolving Ministry

In the 1960s, the Second Vatican Council called for the spiritual renewal of clergy and laity. This coincided with the wider upheavals and societal changes of the decade.

As a result, the Martha’s Ministry of Spirituality evolved. The Marthas came to embrace a more inclusive and holistic approach to spirituality and stewardship, one that encompassed both people and the environment, and that recognized *“all are interconnected and interdependent, and a spiritual energy joins all living things”* [Sr. Joan (Ann Martin) Fultz, Martha Superior]. Today the Marthas aim to foster spiritual and personal growth through practices like self-reflection, meditation, mindfulness, and a connection with nature.

Spiritual Direction ***Come as You Are***

“You don’t have to pray at all, or pray well, or feel that you are close to God or even living the life you want to. Spiritual direction is a very simple process of putting out what you want and most deeply desire and having someone respond to that and help you to live from what you really want. So, come as you are and at least try it.”

Sister Mary Ann Scofield

Come as You Are by Sister Mary Ann Scofield RSM (Religious Sisters of Mercy) illustrates the accepting and inclusive approach underlying the Marthas’ Spirituality Ministry.



Sister Sylvia (Maria Bernadette) MacDonal and squirrel. St. Theresa's Garden, Bethany Grounds, Antigonish, 2005



St. Theresa's Garden, Bethany Grounds, Antigonish, 2021

These and subsequent photographs courtesy of CSM Communications.



*Labyrinth, Bethany Grounds,
Antigonish, 2015*



Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto, Bethany Grounds, Antigonish, 2007



*Hermitage, Bethany Grounds,
Antigonish, 2005*

Spirituality on Bethany Grounds

Guided by a deep respect for the environment, the Marthas initiated several renovations to the Bethany Grounds in the early 2000s, creating contemplative walking trails, two hermitages, and a labyrinth. Each space offers the opportunity to sit in stillness: to be surrounded by plants, animals, and birds, and be immersed in the beauty of nature.



Welcome! *Sister Claire (Ann Carmel) MacNeil* opening the door to Marian Community, Antigonish, 2019



Gathering Room, Bethany Resource Centre, Antigonish, 2019



Marian Community, Bethany Grounds, Antigonish, 2021

New Expressions: Spirituality for All

The Marthas have continued to nurture new expressions of spirituality in the 21st century. While only a small example of the myriad roles they have played in the spiritual lives of those around them, they have provided Pastoral Care in their parishes and hospitals, acted as chaplains, and gave spiritual direction to L'Arche communities throughout Nova Scotia.

Various programs such as Centering Prayer, Oasis days, retreats, workshops, and spiritual guidance are still offered and supported by the Sisters, coordinated through the Marian Community and the Bethany Resource Centre in Antigonish.



Wellspring Centre, St. F.X. University, Antigonish, 2020

In town, Martha spirit and hospitality can still be found at Wellspring Centre on the St.F.X. University campus. It serves as a welcoming inter-faith space open to all students, faculty, and staff. Besides a gathering room and seminar room, it also houses quiet rooms for private meditation or prayer.



Wellspring Centre, St. F.X. University, Antigonish, 2020

Notes

For a further exploration of the role of nuns in vacation schools and correspondence catechism courses, as illustrated by another Canadian religious congregation, see the Sisters of Service's overview of Religious Education: [Religious Education](#)

For further information on the radical shift in Catholic theology that occurred under the Second Vatican Council, see: [Britannica: Second Vatican Council](#)

Consult J. Cameron chapters 10 and 11, especially p.252-255, for a more detailed explanation of the changes wrought in the congregation throughout the 1960s. [And Martha Served.pdf](#)

Details on the current roster of Spirituality oriented programs and workshops offered by the Sisters of St. Martha, as well as information on the rental of hermitages, and the newsletter *Martha Ministry of Spirituality* can be found here: themarthas.com/ministry-spirituality

Additionally, information about the services still being provided at the Martha Retreat Centre in Lethbridge, Alberta can be found on the website: martharetreatcentre.ca



Notes

For notices and operating hours of Wellspring at St. Francis Xavier University see: mystfx.ca/wellspring

For CSM page about Wellspring see: <https://themarthas.com/ministry-stfx-wellspring.php>

Inspirational stories from the past 25 years about Wellspring's influence on the campus and the lives of students, can be viewed here: [Wellspring Stories](#)

