

Our Life as Mission

NEWS FROM MARTHA
LEADERSHIP TEAM



Sisters of St. Martha

"Standing together in undaunted hope"



*Photo: Sister Mary Donalda MacDonald with violin
Antigonish, NS, 1966*

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LENT...SEEKING GOD'S WAY...GOD'S LIGHT

In these early days of Lent I find myself remembering the many years when I chose to give up something for Lent or make a simple act of fasting. These last few years, I have come to believe that Lent isn't simply about us giving something up. The real grace we receive is when we recognize it as a season in which God wants to give us something. Let us gather in our minds eye at the foot of the cross...at the empty tomb...and at the early brilliant sunrise on Easter morning proclaiming Jesus is Risen! Alleluia!

God wants to help transform our lives, our efforts and make us even more free as a people. We yearn to be freer with God and with how we love our families, neighbours and earth our common home. God is inviting us to go more deeply into listening to the tiny nudgings of the heart inviting us to ask for the grace to live more honestly the values we hold dear.

Most importantly, I believe that Lent is a Journey we make together. Just like the synodal journey we are learning to walk as Church. We journey as sisters and brothers, and as a community. We journey with one another at home but also with our staff, our friends, and many collaborators.

My prayer is that this Lenten Journey will lead us all into making life-giving choices. May we embrace together the mystery and shadow of Good Friday as well as light of Resurrection. May we be moved from emptiness...to self-giving...to pouring out our time, our energy, and our prayer to those most in need.

In Mathew's Gospel (Mt. 7:14) Jesus tells the disciples to go by the narrow and the hard way. A desert monk in the 5th century was asked, "what is the narrow and hard way"? He answered, "the narrow and hard way is to control your thoughts and strip yourself of your own way for the sake of God."

Let us gather in our minds eye at the foot of the cross...at the empty tomb...and at the early brilliant sunrise on Easter morning proclaiming Jesus is Risen! Alleluia!

~ Sr. Brendalee Boisvert



20TH GENERAL CHAPTER

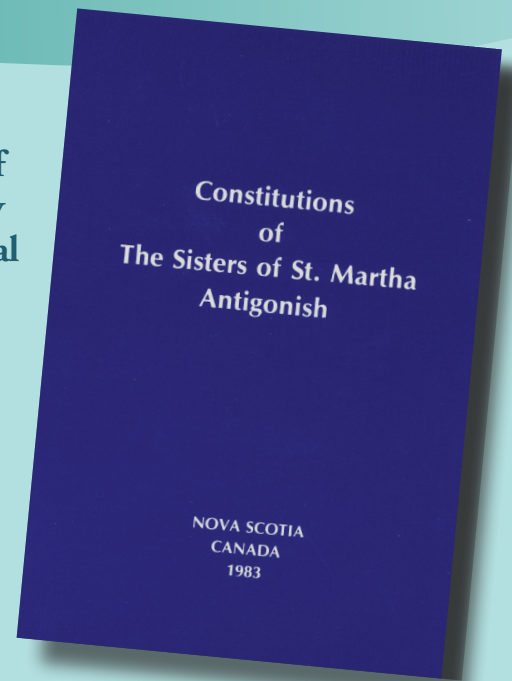
A General Chapter is the highest authority within a Congregation when in session. We as the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Martha, Antigonish hold a Chapter every five years. In April 2024, we will gather for the 20th General Chapter.

“The general chapter is a grace-filled event for the congregation, for the church and for the world”

Constitutions #111

“The role of the chapter is to promote unity according to our particular spirit, while searching for common goals which express fidelity to our mission in the church.”

Constitutions #113



General Chapter is made up of two parts, not separate, but distinct: Chapter of Affairs, which focuses on topics and matters of the Congregation, and Chapter of Elections which focuses on the election of the Congregation Leader and Council.

We have been preparing for this graced event in the life of our Congregation in several ways:

- ◆ In January 2023 we were blessed to have a day with Sr. Kelly Connors, PM, a Canonist who works at the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (DICLSAL). She shared with us on the topic of Future Possibilities in Governance. It was a day rich in sharing with one another and reflecting on “what is it that we need from one another”.
- ◆ In February 2023, we engaged Sr. Mary Rowell, CSJ, as facilitator for our Chapter. Sr. Mary has facilitated a number of Chapters for Congregations in Canada and in the US. She has also facilitated a variety of other meetings including assemblies and diocesan synodality conversations, as well as leading retreats. She is currently the president of Vocations Canada and works at Villa St. Joseph, a eco-spirituality centre in Cobourg, Ontario. Her rich background in theology, ethics, and spiritual accompaniment provides many tools and skills from which she draws in her facilitation.



20TH GENERAL CHAPTER

- ◆ We gathered as a Congregation in May 2023 with Sr. Mary facilitating and helping us to continue the conversation that began with Sr. Kelly Connors.
- ◆ We gathered again in October 2023 to focus in more clearly on what we needed to give attention to.
- ◆ Following that gathering we met in small groups, local communities, and individually to offer ideas for a Chapter theme. The Chapter Planning Committee pulled together all the contributions and developed our Chapter Theme: *Graced with courage to welcome and help shape the emerging future.*



CSM Leadership Team with Debbie Castle and Marielle Assad at January 2024 Martha Gathering

This theme will guide us as we develop the topics for discussion at Chapter, during the Chapter, and moving forward with a direction for the 2024-2029 term. In fact, our most recent Chapter Preparation Gathering in January 2024 was focused on surfacing topics that will make up the content for our Chapter Meetings in April. We have always trusted in the movement of the Spirit among us at Chapter and continue to do so. We invite your prayers for us as we meet to pray, discuss, discern and elect. Perhaps now more than ever we lean into our Vision Statement adopted at Chapter 2004:

We Sisters of St. Martha, embraced in the Mystery of God, are empowered to move creatively into the future. We live the prophetic dimension of our vocation as grace for our time. We aspire to live hospitality in a spirit of welcome to the reality of our lives and to our interdependence with all creation. Out of our emerging consciousness of the signs of the times, we are inspired to set free our Charism, risking for the sake of the Gospel. Led by the Spirit of the Risen Jesus, we step into the future as women of undaunted hope.

(Chapter 2004)

*Did you
know?*
CSM FACTS

MARTHAS AND MUSIC



*Photo and all
text excerpts: Happy Memories -
Novitiates Album, 1953*

A Lesson in Gregorian Chant

Since the earliest days of the Congregation, Sisters have been trained to sing in choir and, for those with special talents, to accompany the singing with organ music. In the 1920s and 1930s, Sisters attended the Pius X School of Music in New York and became familiar with Plain Chant, the official music of the Church. With the passing of Latin in the liturgy, however, and to the great regret of those who cherished the Chant, for the most part it was replaced by more modern Church music. (Adapted from *CSM Newsletter*, Fall 1996).

MUSIC IN THE NOVITIATE

In our Novitiate at Bethany, music ranges from the angelic strains of Gregorian Chant to the very catching melody of "The Teddy-Bear's Picnic", to say nothing of the instrumental music provided by different Sisters on piano, organ and flute.

Gregorian Chant to most of us meant little or nothing before our entrance into religious life, but even after a few months of instruction in the fundamentals of Chant, who will deny its exquisite beauty and adaptability to the liturgical worship of Holy Mother Church? Moreover, in comparison with modern music - chant comes easily even to beginners, once they have acquired basic knowledge of this form of music peculiar to the Catholic Church.

Modern Church music, too, has its place at Bethany and indeed adds much to the celebration of the different feasts of the year and to the Clothing and Profession ceremonies.

MARTHAS AND MUSIC *continued*

During the postulancy and again after the Novice's canonical year has been completed, any discovered and musical talent is developed in the individual Sisters and theirs is the privilege of private weekly lessons given by patient and competent instructresses among the Professed Sisters. Usually between the six and six-thirty periods in the evenings, the Novitiate corridors re-echo the sounds of scales, chords and orpeggios, as well as varied selections from the different composers. These Sisters also receive instructions in organ-playing which may prove very helpful to them on some future mission during professed life. Who knows where one may be organist or choir directress?

The first Sister to study music was **Sr. Raphael Watt**. She was missioned in Canso, NS where the Marthas undertook choral work and piano instruction in the 1930s. Sister Raphael "had studied in Toronto Conservatory of Music and was a licensed music instructor, taught its piano repertoire to interested students. In 1940 and 1941, she succeeded in luring its founder, Sir Ernest MacMillan, on the long adventure from Toronto to Canso, where he examined her students. Hence, Canso became one of the first Maritime centres to offer the Toronto Conservatory program. Sister Raphael would still have music pupils until she was 86 years old." (James Cameron, *And Martha Served*, p.139)

Drawing on their expertise in music, the Marthas brought spirituality to the communities they lived in through liturgical and inspirational song. One way this was accomplished was by organizing children's as well as adult choirs to provide music for local Masses.

As school teachers, the Marthas deeply valued Art, Music, Theatre & Performance. They saw it as integral to a "full and abundant life" and they provided specialized arts instruction to their rural students. They were quickly adding music and art to their subjects in the schools where they taught.

Finally, it would hardly be fair to pass over in silence those evening recreation periods when the Sisters gather round the piano for a sing-song - - - a happy smile on every face. This is the time when all Scotch, French, Irish and English favorites and now and then a German folksong or two are remembered and heartily sung. Never to be forgotten are those evening we sang the Christmas carols around our gaily decorated Christmas tree and again the humerous Irish melodies on St. Patrick's night.

And so our Novitiate years quickly slip by, music plays an important part in our prayer-life and in our recreation and we would do well to keep before our minds the little motto of St. Augustine "He who sings, prays twice".

Sr. Margaret Mary Hervé of North Sydney, Cape Breton, born in 1928, became a trained musician after making her final vows. She eventually earned a degree that allowed her to teach in schools. She taught music and piano and prepared students for music festivals, TV programs, concerts, and parish choirs. Some of her students reached high musical achievements. While teaching, she also served the parishes as organist, choir director, and often in the religious education programs. Sr. Margaret Mary played a Cassavant pipe organ at Bethany Chapel for all liturgical functions.



Sr. Margaret Mary Hervé at the pipe organ, 1994

MARTHAS AND MUSIC *continued*

Later in life, faithful to her apostolate of music in the wider community, Sr. Margaret Mary went out once a week to two residences for senior citizens in Antigonish where she entertained by playing familiar “oldies” and other music to the residents, and led them in singsong.

SISTERS OF ST. MARTHA CHORAL GROUP

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 January 26th 1965. The Sisters set up stage in the StFX University Auditorium and brought along everything from a guitar and ukulele to maracas and a bongo drum! Held in support



Marthas on a Mission group 2005

MARTHAS ON A MISSION

In 2001, a small musical group of younger singing Sisters was formed. In 2006, it became known as Marthas on a Mission. They chose to use their gifts of music, song, and storytelling to promote a Culture of Vocation and as a way of sharing the values and Charism of the Sisters of St. Martha. The group networked with parishes in fund raising for local endeavours and in building community spirit, all the while helping to make the call to religious life more visible in the midst of people. Over the years, they were invited to sing at Martha Gatherings and other Congregational celebrations, they also performed at Charity Federation gathering of hosted in Antigonish. They made a vocation tour in Newfoundland and Quebec and travelled to Alberta where they offered six concerts. In 2013, Marthas on a Mission chose to bring to closure their unique and meaningful music, song, and storytelling ministry.



Sisters of St. Martha Choral Group performing at StFX University in 1965. Detail from scrapbook, illustrating “Let There be Music”

of local priests from the diocese working in Latin America, the Sisters successfully raised \$1,489. Later that year, on May 2nd, 1965, the Marthas also made their first television appearance as the choir for Sunday Mass on CJTV.

In the following decades, Marthas continued to form choirs that performed at Mass and other congregational events. In addition, since mid-1970s, liturgical dance became part of liturgical celebrations at Bethany Motherhouse.



Music has always been an essential part of Martha community living. Besides giving musical instruction to community members, forming organized choirs or music groups, a great number of Sisters, too many to mention here by name, played or still play an instrument, many are incredibly talented singers. Some, devoted their whole ministry life to music. We will learn more about the rich music ministry of Sisters Mary Gouthro and Lillian Gaudet in the section *Voices from Ministries in this newsletter*. For many Sisters, music has been an essential nourishment for the soul in their Religious Life, complementing their prayer life.

Sr. Brendalee Boisvert, Congregation Leader, is quite a musician herself. Music has been with her all her life. She was 7 years old when her parents enrolled her in accordion

cornet in girls marching band for parades. She began taking voice lessons around 16 with the Sisters of Providence. Her teacher was Sr. Marie Dundon and together they did many musicals. Sr. Brendalee became a voice major and received Grade 10 certificate in voice and learned Grade 6 in piano at the Royal Conservatory of Music. She entered many festivals in her early years and has several awards for accordion and voice. Sr. Brendalee did a double major in music and psychology at Queen's University in Kingston. While pursuing her studies there, she took lessons on guitar, violin, saxophone, clarinet, trumpet, piano, trombone, timpani drums. For fun, she learned alto and soprano recorders and played in some small group gatherings. Some of these instruments she no longer considers herself qualified to play, she recently gave away her accordion, but continues to play guitar, piano, organ, trumpet, French horn, trombone and uses her voice whenever possible. She especially loves to sing descant.



lessons. She also played piano and organ, the instruments available at home. When she was 13, a local parish gave her a guitar and asked to learn how to play it so she could play for folk Masses, which had become the rage. In grade 9, she took music, joined the school band, and became a French horn soloist, and later, the lead trumpeter in both the school and dance bands. She also played

WHAT MUSIC MEANS TO YOU?

"When I was a teen, I found myself making up songs when life was sometimes hard to understand. It was a release of my inner thoughts and stirrings. Before I entered the Congregation, I wrote songs as I searched for where it felt God was calling me. After I entered, I recorded ten of those songs that spoke of my search for God and God's longing for me to live in God's spirit. Some Sisters of St. Martha joined me in that recording. I have written many other songs since then. Music has always been a way for me to communicate those feelings that are too hard to speak in words but need a freer form or medium. It has been one of the greatest blessings in my life. I think if you are able to offer your message in song, it comes from a deeper place...one might even say from the soul."

~ Sr. Brendalee Boisvert



MARTHA MEMORIES IN OBJECTS

With so many talented musicians among the Sisters throughout the decades, instruments were precious possessions. Each one a piece of art, a faithful companion, a medium to express one's emotions and the depths of the soul, a witness to communal moments of joy and happiness that music sessions usually inspire.

This button accordion with 21 treble buttons and 8 brass buttons; note range C-F; two leather straps; and the word "Bethany" on one side was made in Germany. It was played by Sister Joan of Arc (Marie Anne) Teletchea (1903-1996). In her necrology we read *"It was her love for the accordion for which she is most remembered. Even in her last years at Bethany, she would play in the dining room for various occasions"*. It is now housed in CSM Archives.



"When words fail to express the exalted sentiments and finer emotions of the human heart, music becomes the sublimated language of the soul, the divine instrumentality for its higher utterance."

Charles William Wendte

The violin pictured here belongs to Sr. Florence Kennedy, a life-long fiddle player and a member of the former group Marthas on a Mission. She tells us a story of its origin:

When I was a young child, a gentleman by the name of Alex MacNeil used to visit my grandmother each summer. He was a school principal in some part of Ontario but had roots in Cape Breton. Alex was interested in Gaelic language and culture which was most likely the reason he visited grandma. My grandmother was a fluent Gaelic speaker and taught Gaelic night classes in the community. Twenty years later, in the early 1980s, I was a member of the Cape Breton Fiddlers Association and I attended a fiddle practice in Baddeck. At that practice, there was a gentleman selling a violin. His name was Neil MacLennan, a friend of Alex MacNeil. Neil told me that Alex had died, and he was tasked with selling his violin. I was very interested in buying Alex's violin and did so that day. Fast tracking to 2024, I still have the violin and play on occasion in our Martha Chapel.

~ Sr. Florence Kennedy



VOICES FROM THE MINISTRIES

In the history of the Congregation, there were Sisters for whom music was their main ministry, and they used their gift throughout their entire lives. Two Sisters, Mary Gouthro and Lillian Gaudet, recently reminisced about their religious life and the role music played in their ministry.

SR. MARY GOUTHRO, 91, comes from Dominion, Cape Breton. She first met the Marthas at her elementary school where the Sisters were teaching home economics and art. She started piano lessons there with **Sr. Mary Rodriquez Steele**. Despite the fact that there was no piano in the house at the time, she persistently asked her parents for the lessons. Later on, she remembers using her allowance to pay for her music instruction. When the family moved to St. Andrews, NS, Sr. Mary was once again taught by the Marthas in the local school. She continued her musical education with an excellent teacher, **Sr. Mary Helene Wadden**, another Martha whose entire ministry life was filled with music. Sr. Mary earned Grade 10 Certificate in piano according to Toronto Conservatory of Music and completed Grade

4 in Harmony, and Grade 5 in Music History.

In high school, she felt attracted to religious life and entered the Congregation when she was 17. She was hoping to become a music teacher, but knew it might not happen - in those times, Sisters were missioned where the need was. She got her Teaching Certificate and was one of the



Sr. Mary Helene Wadden performing with pupils at the CJFX Radio, 1958.



Sr. Mary Gouthro

first Marthas sent to teach in Ingonish, Cape Breton. She then taught in other places across Nova Scotia. While she wasn't able to teach music until getting her BA in Music Education in 1969, anytime there was an occasion that required special song or music, she was the one to do it. Sr. Mary taught for 24 years in different schools in Nova Scotia and Alberta. She remembers especially well her ministry in Eskasoni First Nations community, where people were "full of music" and could play instruments and sing very well; it seemed that "music was in their bones."

In 1977, in a sudden ministry switch, she was called to the Congregation's General Administration to become Vocation Education Director. After the term, she returned to Eskasoni but not to teach. She became a Pastoral Assistant, and, for many decades

VOICES FROM THE MINISTRIES

afterwards, did parish work in different communities - a ministry she truly enjoyed. Although she didn't go back to teaching music in an academic setting, it was always attached to her parish work. Wherever she went, she did workshops and led church and parish choirs. Giving people confidence in their abilities and encouraging them to sing to the best of their abilities was life-giving. She recalls a very special multicultural choir she directed in Calgary's St. Thomas More Parish. She took care of the music for the piece, while participants sang in their own language (seven in total!) for this very special, multinational Christmas Mass. It only proved what she already knew - that music is a universal language that brings people together.

Sister Mary is also a composer. She is the author of *"Martha, Woman of God"*, an official hymn of the Congregation. In 1998, Sr. Florence Kennedy asked her to consider composing a special piece of music for her final vows. Sr. Mary wasn't sure if she would be able to do it, but kept the request close to her heart. She studied all she could about Saint Martha and at some point words and melody just came. Former Sister and a great singer, Sandra White, put the harmony into the music for the hymn. Everybody loved 'the Martha song' and, since then, it is often sung during Mass.



*Sr. Mary Gouthro
and Martha Chorale*

time at St. Mary's and St. Patrick's elementary schools. She loved teaching, inspiring and growing the musical talents of young people.

While there, Sister Mary also directed a women's choir called The Singing Bells. This choir competed in music festivals and in 1971 reached their highest outcome. At that time there was a local choir called The Ann Campbell Singers who were 'the choir to beat' in those days. The Singing Bells Choir was ecstatic when they tied The Ann Campbell Singers at that music festival. This remains a fond Lethbridge memory for Sister Mary.

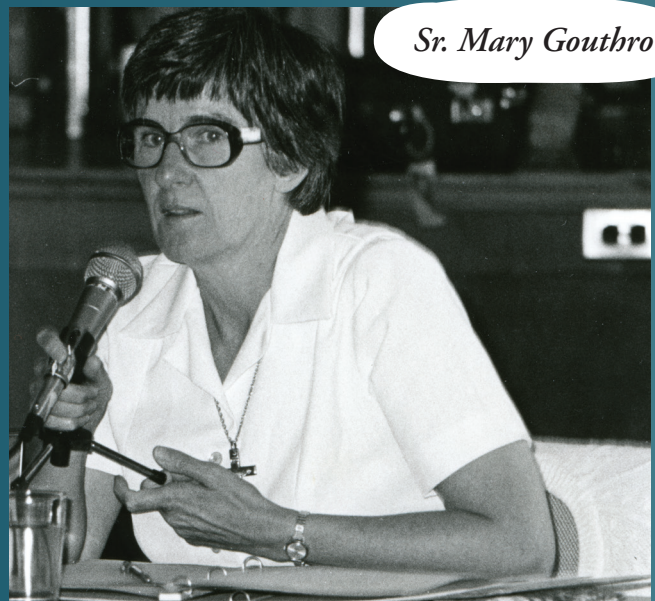
Sister Mary returned to Nova Scotia in September 1972 to continue teaching music but in 2001, she was back in Calgary where she stayed until 2009. She worked as a pastoral director at St. Thomas More Parish where she was given the opportunity to become the



SISTER MARY GOUTHRO'S ALBERTA STORY AND THE HEAVEN BREAKS FORTH ON THE EARTH CD CREATION.

*Story written by Kathy Gillis, Lethbridge
Martha Associate with input from Sr. Mary
Gouthro, Sr. Florence Kennedy and Barbara
Learmont, Calgary Martha Associate.*

From 1969 to 1972, Sister Mary Gouthro resided in Lethbridge where she taught music at Catholic Central High School and part-



Sr. Mary Gouthro

VOICES FROM THE MINISTRIES

Director of the church's choir. She recalled how magnificent and talented the choir was so creating a formal CD was 'easy'. The only challenge was that the recording was done in the church, and they had to pause each time an airplane flew over! Out of this coordinated effort the St. Thomas More Parish choir created *Heaven Breaks Forth on the Earth* CD in 2006. Sister Mary is also a composer and composed the hymn, *I Long for You O God*, which is on the CD. Barb Learmont, who is a Calgary Martha Associate, was in this choir and designed the CD cover.

The CD was used as a fund raiser for the St. Thomas More Parish specifically to purchase a Baby Grand Piano for the parish. Once the piano was purchased, additional funds were used for other needs within the parish. In November 2023, Barbara generously donated the remaining CDs to the Martha Retreat Centre, hoping that the funds raised will contribute to some of the funding needs for the Centre. The Centre Team is grateful for this generous gift and excited to share this CD with our Martha Centre friends and companions.



These days Sr. Mary doesn't play as often as she would like to. She misses this a lot. Sr. Mary continues listening to and praying with music." Throughout her life, she influenced and encouraged other Sisters to take a similar path and let the music be the main thread of their ministry. One of them is **SR. LILLIAN GAUDET**, 93, a native of Sydney, NS, a musician and a life-long music teacher. In her early twenties, Sr. Lillian was leading a typical young person life, working, going out with friends, etc. But she remembers never really enjoying it, feeling that something was missing in her life. She knew the Marthas since childhood, attended summer camps where the Sisters were helping out, and was always drawn by their kindness, warmth, and



*Sr. Lillian Gaudet
at her 25th Anniversary*

simplicity. These were all the values she knew from home. In fact, she says that she was attracted to this particular community because they seemed much like her family. Having had some secretarial experience, she continued her education upon entering the Congregation in 1952, eventually earning her Teaching Diploma in 1957. She taught in different schools in Nova Scotia as well as in Picture Butte, Alberta.

But Sister Lillian wasn't sure if teaching was a good option for her, she was used to it, but felt that she wanted to go in a different direction in her ministry. She was told to figure out what she wanted to do. Music had always been in her life, her father played fiddle and she remembers herself at three, standing on a table, singing for people, something she did frequently. She had taken some singing classes, attended Holy Angels choir practice and had about five years of piano instruction. Aware of this background, Sister Mary Gouthro encouraged Sister Lillian to go into the two

VOICES FROM THE MINISTRIES

year course in liturgy at StFX University, which is what she did, and graduated in 1983 with a Diploma in Church Music. In 1984, she was missioned to Inverness, NS, to work on the Stella Maris Parish Team. She coordinated music for the parish, the only one in the Diocese to have music coordination at the time. It is in Inverness where she heard from another Sister about the Music for Young Children (MYC) program and was encouraged to offer one in Antigonish at Bethany Motherhouse. Before making a decision, she travelled to Sydney to observe a MYC class one evening; and from that moment on she was hooked. For 25 years she taught Music for Young children and five years after that, singing.

In the Winter 1997 edition of the *Marthas in Mission* Congregation newsletter, Sr. Lillian wrote an update describing her nine years at the time as MYC program coordinator:

"It has been a privilege and joy to teach Music for Young Children as a Bethany service open to public. It was established to serve the people in the area who wish to start their children in music. We have a special room furnished with keyboards and other musical equipment suitable for young children. More than 300 children have gone through the program. Each year, they perform in two recitals: a Christmas concert and a spring festival, which are attended by family members of the children, who fill the Bethany auditorium. MYC is a music program for children 3 to 8 years. While those attending school arrive at Bethany after four o'clock the 4-year-olds come in the morning as they are not yet school pupils. The Sisters enjoy meeting the youngsters as they come through our corridors with such energy and enthusiasm to attend one-hour long classes weekly with a parent. Through singing, keyboard activities, and rhythm



*Sr. Lillian Gaudet's
MYC students in the classroom, 1995*

ensembles, the students are introduced to the language of music. Various songs and names for dynamics and notes help to support the terms that are used. [...] The parent who is present in class with the children is able to reinforce the new skills and help to keep motivation at high level between classes. Incidentally, the parents claim that they enjoy the program as much as the children do. Thus a child's introduction to music becomes a family affair in more ways than one. [...] The program originated in Dartmouth around 1970, devised by Frances Balodis, a registered music teacher. [...] Children who have completed the program are ready for private lessons. Some of my graduates have gone on to be very successful little musicians." ~ Sr. Lillian Gaudet

(1997, Marthas in Mission)

The unique approach of including parents in

VOICES FROM THE MINISTRIES



Sr. Lillian with a student

the learning process produced "little musicians" that were calm and not nervous at recitals as they were used to playing in front of the parents and other adults, says Sr. Lillian. Later on, she decided to stop sending her pupils to competitive festivals, not seeing the educational value of the extreme stress these events were putting on the students. Instead, she started organizing fund raising concerts, with the proceeds going to the people in need, such as local Syrian immigrants or people in Rwanda.

She also did a short musical to engage the children, a full on mini-theatrical production. While reminiscing about the play, Sr. Lillian mourned the loss of Bethany Motherhouse - "the centre of everything" with its beautiful, multifunctional auditorium and a space in the basement for teaching that served her so well for the lessons over the years.

Sister Lillian, a great believer that anyone can learn singing through age-appropriate education aimed at developing in her students the inner rhythm that already "lives" in people's bodies. She enjoyed immensely working with youngsters and retired from her role as MYC teacher in 2013, after 25 years of service.

These days, just like Sister Mary, Sister Lillian is coming to terms with the fact that she can't do music anymore. She has sung all her life but cannot do it now for health reasons, although she says she has always had good pitch and can still hear music in her head.

The rich, wonderful history of music and the Sisters of St. Martha, stems from the Christian tradition of worshipping God through song. Music became an important part of life of many Marthas over the decades. The Congregation is still full of wonderful musicians, some even perform at important occasions, many do not, but the music remains close to their hearts.



Sisters of St. Martha of Antigonish and Sisters of St. Martha of PEI performing together at the Sisters of Charity Federation Annual Meeting in Antigonish, NS in June 2023.

MARTHA ASSOCIATES UPDATE



It just so happens that I am looking out my window at our first significant snowfall for the Winter season. Since it is the end of January, we certainly cannot complain about the weather, and I must say, it does look rather pretty! As we near the end of January, it is time once again to provide our Sisters of St. Martha with a little update on the Martha Associates.

We began our year back in September 2023, with the annual Martha Associate Retreat. Our Eastern Retreat was held on Saturday, September 9th, 2023, while the Western Retreat was held throughout the weekend of September 15th – 17th, 2023. We were blessed to have Sr. Brendalee Boisvert, CSM lead us in our retreats. The theme was: “Faithful to the Journey: Walking Together in Communion; Pouring out Our Lives”. Sr. Brendalee introduced us to the Woman with the Alabaster jar (Mk. 14: 3 – 9),



guiding us to look at this woman and this Gospel passage in new and wonderful ways!

At the close of our retreats, Sr. Brendalee invited the Associates and Sisters present with us, to come forward and to have our hands anointed with the oil contained within her Alabaster jar. She challenged us to continue to pour out our extravagant oil of love in our world. It was truly a special time of prayer and reflection for all of us.

The Martha Associates have also been blessed to welcome four new associates! Patricia Ryba was received in a lovely celebration on November 12th, 2023, in the presence of the Sydney / Glace Bay Associates, Sr. Josephine MacLellan and Sr. Catherine MacFarlane. On January 23rd, 2024, David Lewis, Doreen Lewis, and Jean Brennick were received in the presence of the St. Clare Associates and Sr. Franklyn Ferguson.



MARTHA ASSOCIATES UPDATE



We are also blessed to have four journeyers in our Sydney /Glacé Bay group, three journeyers in the St. Clare group, and two journeyers in the Lethbridge group. The newly formed Antigonish Martha Associate group has begun gathering regularly under the coordination of Sr. Sandra Cooke. It is fair to say that this group is in the early stages of growing together, and I hope to give you a little more information in my next report.

The Martha Associate Committee had our first meeting of 2024 on January 25th. The Committee meets every two to three months, depending on what is on our agenda. As Martha Associate Director, I am deeply grateful for the committee members, for their ongoing support and commitment to the Martha Associates!



◆ We are busy planning the coming year, especially deciding on a theme for the next annual Associate Retreat which will be held on September 7th, 2024, in the East and September 13th – 15th, 2024, in the West.

◆ We are also revising the Martha Associate Handbook, for which we are making excellent progress.

We have had a few changes in the members of the Martha Associate Committee this year. Sr. Catherine MacFarlane and Linda McNeil have finished their terms on the committee. Thank you to both ladies for their insights, ideas, and dedication.

A special thank you to our current committee members who continue to work together to support all Martha Associate activities moving forward. They are: Kathy Gillis, Lethbridge; Annella Wehlage, Lethbridge; Gary Rankin, Trenton; Joy MacIntosh, Trenton; Mike Finigan, Sydney/Glacie Bay; Sr. Josephine MacLellan; Sr. Claudette Gallant; Sr. Sandra Cooke and Julia Townsend (Director).

We welcome our newest member to the committee, Ken MacAdam from the Sydney / Glacé Bay group. We are grateful for your generosity to serve on the committee.

MARTHA ASSOCIATES UPDATE



On January 14, 2024, the Sydney / Glace Bay group had a special celebration to honor Sr. Catherine MacFarlane on her milestone birthday (90)!! With songs, blessings and a chocolate cake with boiled frosting, we think Sr. Catherine enjoyed the surprise!!

As I close my update, I want to thank all Sisters of St. Martha for your prayers and support of the Martha Associates. Please know that you are all very dear in the hearts of all Martha Associates, and you are forever in our prayers!

God Bless,

~ Julia Townsend

Director Martha Associates

January 29, 2024





*Embracing Our Neighbour and
Our Common Home*

GREETINGS FROM MARTHA JUSTICE MINISTRY

Greetings to you all!



The season of Lent is well underway, and I hope it is a time of deep spiritual grounding for you. Lent provides us with an opening for dedicated spiritual practice and reflection. Often, for me, this connects with the work of justice. The time in the wilderness is one that lends itself to deepened solidarity with those who are struggling in so many ways, as the world faces growing conflicts, climate impacts, poverty, and inequity. We see these struggles in our communities, as well. Lent allows us the space to hold them in our hearts and prayers, staying with the hardness of the challenges, but also knowing that the light of Easter lies ahead.

The hard work of solidarity and justice must be sustained by undaunted hope. As you read the updates shared below, I hope you find inspiration in the work that we do together with so many dedicated people in our communities and beyond. Peace and Blessings,

Darlene O'Leary, Coordinator, Martha Justice Ministry





*Embracing Our Neighbour and
Our Common Home*

COADY COFFEE HOUSE PRESENTATION

On January 22nd, Sister Joanne O'Regan and Darlene O'Leary gave a presentation as part of the Coady Institute's Coady Coffee House Series, hosted by Digafie Debalke. The session was called *"The Sisters of St. Martha: A Lifelong Journey of Peace."*



*The recording of this conversation
is available online. Click [here](#) to see it.*

The session took place in the lovely Sister Marie Michael Library at the Coady Institute. We were joined by about forty people in person and sixty online from around the world!

It was a wonderful chance to talk about how peace is deeply interwoven in the foundations of the Marthas as a community and in the example of St. Martha. Sister Joanne used the images of "big feet, thick necks" to reflect the work and life of the Marthas as a community and in the community in responding to

needs grounded in Gospel Hospitality. She also shared the wonderful folk story of Martha "taming the dragon," as an image and witness to peacebuilding.

Darlene built on this in sharing what grounds the work of Martha Justice Ministry as we seek peace directly and through the interconnections of social and ecological justice and reconciliation. As well, through our work with the Sisters of Charity Federation UN NGO, in particular around support for implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



We had a very good conversation with a very engaged group participating in the discussion. Thank you to the organizers and participants!



*Embracing Our Neighbour and
Our Common Home*

MJM AT CSocD62

In February, the 62nd UN Commission for Social Development (CSocD62) took place in New York City. As part of the Sisters of Charity Federation NGO delegation, Darlene O'Leary and Joanne Tompkins, a member of the Martha Justice Ministry Core Group, participated online, as the big storm that hit Nova Scotia prevented them from attending in person.

The theme of this year's Commission was:

"Fostering social development and social justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication".

There were a good number of NGO Liaisons from the Sisters of Charity Federation participating, as well as Jimmy Walters, the NGO Representative. Several Canadian religious and staff from other NGOs also attended.

As part of the Commission activities, Darlene and Joanne took part in the NGO

Committee Orientation and Civil Society Forum, where civil society representatives deepen our engagement in the theme with panels and discussion. The Commission was a great learning experience and opportunity to bring the voice of civil society to these global conversations, as we engage as global citizens. Visit [Darlene's latest blog entry](#) to read more about this event.



SEASON OF CREATION 2023

On October 4th, more than twenty people gathered in St. Theresa's Garden on Bethany property for our annual *Season of Creation Prayer Celebration*.

The Season of Creation is a global, ecumenical celebration of our common home that takes place from September 1st to October 4th each year. At our gathering, we reflected on our connection with the earth, waters, and all creation, guided by the theme "Let Justice and Peace Flow". We prayed together for the protection of our common home. It was a beautiful day to gather for this prayer celebration of creation.





*Embracing Our Neighbour and
Our Common Home*

“GIVE IT UP FOR THE EARTH!” CAMPAIGN

This year, we will participate in the annual Lenten campaign, “Give it up for the Earth”, organized by For the Love of Creation and Citizens for Public Justice.

This Lenten campaign includes three action items:

1. A pledge to reduce your personal and household greenhouse gas emissions.
2. A commitment to embrace eco-spirituality through climate action and by building relationships with the Indigenous communities on whose traditional territories we live, work, and play.
3. Sending a letter to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, Steven Guilbeault, urging him to set more ambitious climate action targets and expressing support for a just transition towards a low-carbon economy.

We encourage everyone to sign on and commit to take action to care for the Earth this Lent!

Click to sign on:

<https://cpj.ca/fortheearth/>

“Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods; it represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day.”

—Pope Francis

Click [here](#) to read a reflection online titled
“Climate Change As a Matter of Faith and Justice.”

GIVE IT UP FOR THE EARTH!

February 14 - March 28, 2024

Take action to reduce emissions, build solidarity with Indigenous Peoples, and call for federal action to achieve climate justice.

Send a letter to Steven Guilbeault, the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change today!



cpj.ca/fortheearth



CITIZENS FOR
PUBLIC JUSTICE 



*Embracing Our Neighbour and
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ORCIE LEARNING & LOBBYING

In March, the Office of Religious Congregations for Integral Ecology (ORCIE) will host its *Learning & Lobbying* activities for Catholic religious.

ORCIE is an Ottawa-based advocacy office for Catholic Religious Congregations focused on federal policy on climate and ecological justice and Indigenous Rights and Reconciliation.

ORCIE's Executive Director, Genevieve Gallant, will coordinate training sessions ahead of a lobby day on Parliament Hill to engage with MPs, Parliamentary staff, and other officials on priority policy issues.

**ORCIE BCRÉI**

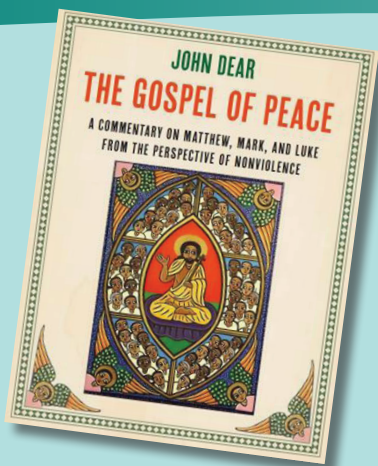
**Congregational Leadership, Staff,
and others working in these areas
are encouraged to participate!**

“BEARING WITNESS” EVENT

In late September, Sister Joanne O'Regan joined Martha Justice Ministry Core Group member, Mark Nixon, for the Bearing Witness event in Lethbridge, Alberta.

The event takes place around the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, also known as Orange Shirt Day. It brings Catholic school division students, teachers, and administrators together in conversations about reconciliation, Catholic social teaching, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. *It was a wonderful event of shared learning!*

MJM LIBRARY



**We are regularly adding justice-related books to our library.
Let us know what you would be interested in reading!**

JOHN DEAR

***“The Gospel of Peace: A Commentary on Matthew, Mark, and
Luke from the Perspective of Nonviolence.”***

This book explores the three Gospels through the lens of Jesus as a nonviolent disrupter and offers reflections on how that helps us engage with the social issues of our time.



*Embracing Our Neighbour and
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NEW GROWERS END OF SEASON

In December, to mark the 10th anniversary of the program, we had a wonderful conversation with the Marthas at Parkland and the New Growers program participants – David Matheson, Danielle Speck, and Clayton MacLeod.



This was a chance for the New Growers to share about their experiences in the program, what they learned, and what their hopes are for young farmers. David, Danielle, and Clayton talked about farming on the Bethany property, some successes and challenges, and ways they have engaged with the larger community. We discussed the difficulties for young farmers as farmland has become hard to access. We also talked about the importance of growing food in a sustainable way that feeds those in need in the community.

The Sisters had some great questions for the



New Growers and welcomed them with a round of applause as they entered! It was clear that they were pleased to meet these young farmers and to be able to support them through this program.

NEW GROWERS IN THE NEWS

The CBC Radio documentary by Rose Murphy about Martha New Growers Program, featuring interviews with Sr. Donna Brady, Sr. Florence Kennedy, and others involved in the program, aired on February 11th on CBC Radio 1, Atlantic Voice.

To listen to the documentary online, click [here](#) or
use the QR code provided.





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CSM MISSION STATEMENT

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