

Our Life as Mission

NEWS FROM MARTHA
LEADERSHIP TEAM

 *Sisters of St. Martha*

ISSUE 17
JUNE 2026

“Standing together in undaunted hope”



In this issue:

- Congregation updates
- 125th Anniversary
- **LIVING THE MARTHA LIFE: Charism and vocation**
- Martha Associate Reflection
- *Standing4Justice* from Darlene

WHERE WE ARE

Dear Collaborators and Friends,

We are pleased to share this June 2026 issue of *Our Life As Mission* with you. In it, we discuss some difficult decisions we have had to make about St. Martha's Regional Hospital. I find myself also wanting to let you know that these choices are part of a broader effort to help create a pathway forward to courageously embrace the emerging future. We are not "checking out" as Sisters of St. Martha. We are making thoughtful decisions that will assist us in living into the future as we are able, given our demographics and our energies.

We still feel that we have much to share with our many collaborators and staff and with many of the organizations we continue to support. Our focus

presently is on looking to a future to grow Martha Justice Ministry; exploring the Charism of the Sisters of St. Martha to live into the future; and finding space where spirituality and contemplation are connected with Justice and Charism. You will learn more about this in the future, as it is still being birthed.

Please continue to visit the grounds seeking spaces to walk, enjoy, and hear the birds and other creatures who greet you in your quiet moments.

We are blessed to have these Bethany Grounds to remind us that we walk with Earth daily and that is pure gift.

*~Sr. Brendalee Boisvert,
CSM Congregation Leader*



THE MARTHAS AND ST. MARTHA HOSPITAL

In 1996, when St. Martha's Hospital in Antigonish became government-owned, community members asked the Sisters of St. Martha to help preserve its mission, leading to a Mission Assurance Agreement between the Nova Scotia Government, Saint Martha's Regional Hospital and the Sisters of Saint Martha. The Mission Assurance Advisory Council was overseeing values, ethics, and spiritual care for the past 30 years.

In March 2026, the Sisters of Saint Martha informed the Nova Scotia Government that we would no longer be able to sponsor the Mission of Saint Martha's Regional Hospital after September 30th, 2026. We identified another organization to replace us in this sponsorship role. The Government did not wish to continue the Mission Assurance Agreement with another sponsor.

Therefore, on September 30, 2026, the Mission Assurance Agreement will come to conclusion. This will mean that Saint Martha's Regional Hospital will no longer be a Catholic Hospital.

At the beginning of June, following a Congregation discernment, we made the decision that the name Saint Martha would need to be removed from the hospital which would support the Government's desire to align the hospital with the other hospitals in Nova Scotia. We believe that if the name remained, it could be perceived as continuing to be a Catholic hospital and that we were still involved in the Mission oversight. The Government will engage in a process of renaming the hospital in accordance with the Nova Scotia Facility Naming Policy.

The Sisters of St. Martha began in 1900 in Antigonish, starting with simple service work at St. Francis Xavier College. As community needs grew, they expanded into healthcare, opening St. Martha's Hospital in 1906 to provide local medical care when none was nearby. Run entirely by the Sisters, the hospital became a centre for compassionate care and nurse training. Over time, it evolved into a modern regional hospital, continuing the Marthas' legacy of service in healthcare and the community. In 1996, the ownership and administrations was handed over to the Nova Scotia Government.



Explore this short infographic "The Marthas and Saint Martha Hospital" on the Martha website.



THE MARTHAS AND ST. MARTHA HOSPITAL

These decisions have been difficult for our Congregation due to the emotional attachment of the past 120 years of our 125-year history. We are pleased that the ministry of Spiritual and Pastoral Care will remain as a blessing for people of all faith traditions.

In the coming months, we will work closely with the Department of Health and Wellness and Nova Scotia Health to design creative ways to celebrate and mark the legacy of our 120-year history at this institution and the 30-year involvement of the Mission Assurance Advisory Council.

We are so grateful for the faithful men and women who have served on the Mission Assurance Advisory Council for the past 30 years and for those from Catholic Health Alliance of Canada who helped us to navigate the challenges of these last years. We were also blessed with excellent speakers for our AGM meetings and feel blessed to have worked with you and learn together.



May 2026 AGM meeting



THE YEAR OF CELEBRATION

It has been nearly a year of joyful celebration guided by the motto, “Standing Together in Hope: Shaping the Emerging Future”, which beautifully reflects the spirit of this meaningful milestone. The 125th Anniversary of the Congregation will conclude on July 29, 2026, with a special Mass at St. Ninian's Cathedral in Antigonish, NS.

UPCOMING: MARTHA PLAY

We invite you to attend a play about the Sisters of St. Martha! *Sister Garden: 8 Tiny Plays About Gospel Hospitality* is a unique outdoor theatre experience presented by the Sisters of St. Martha as a gift to the community in celebration of their 125th Anniversary.

Written and directed by Laura Teasdale, the play is set throughout Bethany Centennial Garden where the audience will journey from scene to scene, encountering eight different "Marthas" whose stories highlight the Congregation's eight core values. Blending humour, music, storytelling, and moments of reflection, the play offers a lighthearted and engaging look at the spirit of Gospel Hospitality that has shaped the Sisters' ministry for 125 years.

While not specifically a children's play, it is appropriate for all ages. Some scenes and characters will be especially enjoyable for children, while others invite deeper reflection and may appeal more to older audience members. Families are warmly welcome to attend together.

The performance lasts approximately 90 minutes, including travel between scenes. The garden pathways are accessible, chairs are provided, and volunteers are available to assist guests throughout the experience.

Tickets are now available at the Antigonish Heritage Museum.



THE YEAR OF CELEBRATION



LIBRARY BOOK DONATION



In celebration of UNESCO World Book Day on April 23, 2026, and in honour of the 125th anniversary of the Sisters of St. Martha, CSM donated 125 books to The People's Place Library in Antigonish and the Cape Breton Regional Library in Sydney. Staff members and representatives of the Leadership Team participated in the deliveries of books and custom bookmarks and joined library staff for photos. This gesture celebrates the joy of reading and learning and reflects



our ongoing dedication to fostering human potential, guided by the Martha Value of Service, as we seek to provide opportunities for the development of persons.



SEED PACKETS

The Marthas also offered 125 kidney bean seed packets as "Pockets of Hope" to grow and share with the community. The seeds were lovingly collected by Meghan Johnny from the Martha Growers Garden and assembled into packets by Sisters and staff. Symbolizing hope for the future and the many ways Martha work will continue to grow and flourish, the seed packets were made available through the Seed Library at the Antigonish Public Library.



Celebrating the present Honoring the past Looking to the future

MUSEUM EXHIBIT AND LECTURE SERIES

As part of the Marthas' 125th anniversary year, the Antigonish Heritage Museum hosted the ***Gospel Hospitality in Action: The Marthas in Antigonish Area*** historical exhibit that celebrated the Congregations 125 years of service in the local community. the Marthas.

The exhibit was accompanied by a series of talks on the history and present life and ministries of the Marthas. This spring, the second part of the series included presentations by Darlene O'Leary on Martha Justice Ministry and the Marthas at the UN (March) and Sr. Donna Brady on the Marthas' years of education on the work of Thomas Berry and others, the Universe Story, and interconnection with all of creation (April). Finally, Charism Coordinator Marielle Assad presented on the Martha charism of Gospel Hospitality (May).



Many thanks to Dr. Barry McKenzie and the Antigonish Heritage Museum for hosting these wonderful community gatherings and conversations!

THE YEAR OF CELEBRATION



Made by a Martha

Artistic Expressions of the Sisters of St. Martha
CSM Archives and Heritage Collection, Antigonish, N.S.



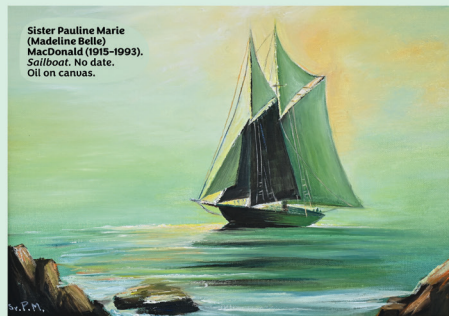
Sister Dorothy (Mary Kateri) Moore (1933-), *Sipuj'j' (Small Gentle Brook)*, Between 1980 and 1999. Oil on canvas.

Landscapes

The natural beauty of the world holds an important place in the creative lives of the Sisters of St. Martha. From coastal scenes to wooded paths, rivers, and ponds, the works of Sisters Mary St. Hugh MacDonald, Pauline Marie MacDonald, and Dorothy Moore capture moments of intimate stillness through seasonal change. Together, these landscapes reflect a close connection to place, where nature is a source of beauty and quiet presence.



Sister Mary St. Hugh (Jessie) MacDonald (1872-1916), *Fall Scene*, 1906. Watercolour.



Sister Pauline Marie (Madeline Belle) MacDonald (1915-1993), *Sailboat*. No date. Oil on canvas.

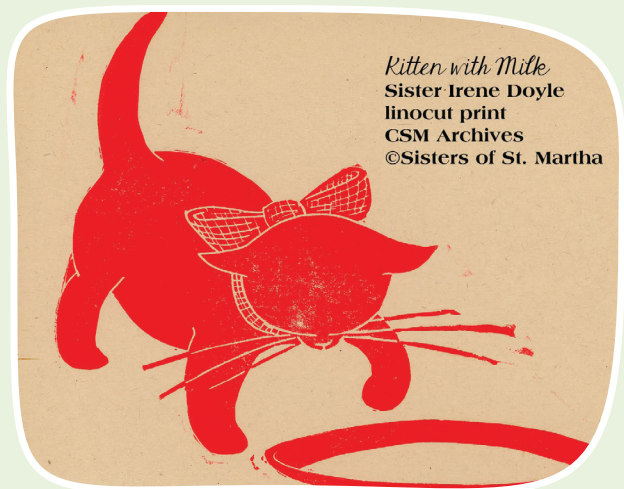


Sister Pauline Marie (Madeline Belle) MacDonald (1915-1993), *Trail through Snow*. No date. Oil on canvas.

"MADE BY A MARTHA" ART EXHIBIT

As part of the 125th Anniversary, the Congregation has created an art exhibit celebrating its rich artistic legacy.

Displayed during June and July 2026 at the The People's Place: Antigonish Town and County Library, six large panels highlight the lives and artwork of Sisters Irene Doyle, Inez Grant, and Adele Cormier, while also exploring the broader artistic spirit of the Marthas.



Kitten with Milk
Sister Irene Doyle
linocut print
CSM Archives
©Sisters of St. Martha

Creativity flourished alongside ministries! Through media such as linocuts, paintings, and detailed embroidery, Sisters' works reveal a personal connection to beauty, faith, and the natural world.

You can see
MADE BY A
MARTHA exhibit
panels online on
Martha website.





Celebrating the present Honoring the past Looking to the future

MEMORY TEA SOCIALS

One of the special initiatives organized for the Sisters during the anniversary year was the Memory Sharing Tea Social series. Three gatherings were held, each exploring a different aspect of congregational life: the Novitiate, Martha missions in Western Canada, and life at the Bethany Motherhouse. Through presentations of archival photographs, Sisters revisited memories of ministries, community life, social activities, and leisure experiences.



Each gathering also provided an opportunity for Sisters to share personal stories and reflections, sparking lively conversations. The socials were well

attended and warmly received, with many Sisters expressing a desire to continue the tradition beyond the anniversary celebrations.

IN THE SPIRIT OF SYNODALITY



As part of the celebrations, the Marthas hosted a special dinner for priests of the Diocese of Antigonish in November with talks by Sr. Jovita MacPherson and Marielle Assad, a Zoom gathering with Sr. Elizabeth Davis in December, and a Welcome Tea in May, with a talk by Sister Claudette Gallant. Together, these events provided opportunities for reflection and fellowship, enriching the CSM 125th Anniversary celebrations, strengthening community connections, and embodying the synodal spirit of listening, dialogue, and walking together in faith.

THE YEAR OF CELEBRATION

Standing
together in
hope

HOCKEY CEREMONIAL PUCK DROP AT STFX UNIVERSITY

On February 27, StFX Athletics celebrated the 125th anniversary of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Martha, honoring their longstanding connection with St. Francis Xavier University and its athletic community. During the X-Women Hockey playoff game, members of the CSM Leadership Team, led by the Congregation Leader, Sister Brenda Lee Boisvert, were welcomed onto the ice for a ceremonial puck drop.

Since their founding in 1900 to support StFX College, the Sisters of St. Martha have contributed in countless ways— from caring for students and preparing meals to cheering on varsity teams, praying for athletes, and even mending uniforms.

Their presence has long been a quiet but meaningful part of the StFX Athletics story. The evening was filled with pride as the Sisters joined players, staff, and fans to celebrate this shared history, offering prayers and encouragement as the X-Women competed with determination, winning the game!





Celebrating the present Honoring the past Looking to the future

WELLSPRING CENTRE CELEBRATION

On March 9th, the Wellspring Centre at St. Francis Xavier University celebrated CSM's 125th anniversary with a tea social. This important ministry of hospitality and presence is in many ways a continuation of founding on the campus of St. Francis Xavier University in 1900. Muffy McIntyre, Wellspring Coordinator, and Sr. Theresa Parker, invited members of the Wellspring Advisory Council, the volunteers, members of the university staff, faculty and students, to gather and share some memories, gratitude and cake! We are grateful for Wellspring for continuing this deep and vital relationship with StFX University.



THANK YOU TO ST. NINIAN PARISH

We are grateful to St. Ninian's Parish community in Antigonish for honouring us with a special Mass on April 26th. It was a beautiful tribute recognizing our 125 years of relationship.



CAPE BRETON COALITION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Cape Breton Coalition for Social Justice has come to completion after 15 years of dedication to serving the most vulnerable in the Sydney area of Cape Breton.

In particular, Sr. Franklyn Ferguson served as Chair and was at the heart of the Coalition, calling people together, networking, organizing, and offering physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual space for its

members and those with whom they worked throughout the Coalition's 15-year existence. Recently, St. Clare Community in Sydney Mines hosted a gathering to formally thank and bring to a close this dedicated Coalition.



ARCHIVISTS CONFERENCE

CSM NEWS

Sister Joanne O'Regan and Sarah MacKeigan were invited to present at the Catholic Archivist Group's Biannual conference held in Charlottetown, PEI from May 11th – 14th, 2026.



Sarah MacKeigan



Sr. Joanne O'Regan

The conference theme was *"Catholic Connections Island Style: Lighting the Way in PEI."* Sr. Joanne and Sarah were invited to share their presentation entitled *"Sharing Our Lives as Mission: Capturing Charism for an Emerging Future"* which explored their experience with integrating lay staff into congregational roles traditionally completed by professed Sisters through their roles as General Secretary and Administrative Assistant.



In the presentation Sister Joanne and Sarah highlighted the importance of using Integral Ecology as a lens for discernment for their records management work.

CRC MEETINGS IN ROME

CSM NEWS

On May 19, 2026, Sister Brendalee Boisvert, CRC president, Sister Bonnie MacLellan, a canonist and loyal collaborator of the CRC, and Father Alain Ambeault, executive director, met in Rome with six leaders of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (DICALSAL).

The current situation of the CRC and its prospects were presented, with particular attention given to the challenges facing many congregations. The presence of many lay people already engaged at the heart of the mission, administration, and governance of religious institutes was highlighted as an essential path forward.

It was further expressed that the dicastery needs to recognize this reality and authorize the Canadian Conference, *ad experimentum*, to accompany both the congregations currently engaged in processes of completion and the organizations already active in this field: Canadian Religious Stewardship (CRS), Réseau Compassion Québec (RCQ), Gestion Providentia, and OPRISC, an Ontario-based group of congregations working together to find common solutions to governance challenges.

The delegation was delighted by the warm welcome it received and by the attentive way the Dicastery leaders listened. They asked

thoughtful questions and each expressed support for the CRC efforts to move forward.



At present, the CRC is awaiting a written document from the Dicastery indicating their stance. The meeting was very enlightening for both parties and the dialogue and spirit of collaboration established between the CRC and the Dicastery will enable the CRC to respond more effectively to the realities and challenges it faces.

Marielle Assad of Martha Charism Ministry and Sister Joanne O'Regan spoke about the Congregation's past, present, and future with Justin Gregg and Anuj Jain, hosts on a popular Antigonish podcast *Let's Talk Antigonish*. The 55-min episode was aired on April 11th and is available online.



YOUTUBE

<https://youtu.be/9Mi6IIIob7c?si=ZNtn3wZ9e5hD2Evo>



SPOTIFY:



SUBSTACK:





MARTHA ASSOCIATES UPDATE

May 11, 2026

As I sit at my computer preparing this update, the rain is coming down outside; certainly not a day for golfers!!! Since our last update written in September of 2025, our Martha Associate Family has grown by two more Associates. **Muffy McIntyre** and **Allan Pettipas** were received on April 25, 2026, in St. Martha Chapel in Antigonish. It was a wonderful celebration attended by several of the Sisters of St. Martha and fellow Associates from the Antigonish group. We also have three Journeyers in our Trenton group; two journeyers in our Sydney group; three journeyers in the Sydney Mines group; and three possible journeyers in the Antigonish group.

I am just completing **MY ANNUAL VISITS TO THE ASSOCIATE GROUPS**. As always, it is a privilege and a joy to visit and spend time with them. Every group is special and each one has its own unique way of being together, sharing friendships, and the many ways they experience Gospel Hospitality in their lives. My last visit for this year will be with the Trenton Associate group on May 17, 2026. They have had a tough year with several family losses, and the sudden loss of a dear friend and Martha Associate, Gary Rankin on April 9, 2026.

Our Martha Associate Committee recently invited **Barry MacKenzie**, a Martha Associate in the Antigonish group, to consider being the speaker for our **MARTHA ASSOCIATE RETREATS** happening in September of 2026. We are delighted that Barry has accepted our invitation. The retreats are scheduled for September 5, 2026, in Antigonish and September 11-13, 2026, in Lethbridge. We are



*Martha Associate Reception, April 25, 2026,
Debbie Pettipas, Allan Pettipas, Muffy
McIntyre, Marielle Assad, Barry MacKenzie*

still working out the details for the retreat and weaving our theme together! Stay tuned for more information to come!!

On May 9, 2026, the Martha Associates, along with some family and friends, participated in the annual **"MASS FOR SHUT INS" TAPING**, to be aired on May 17, 2026. Our presider was Fr. Bill Burke; our music was provided by Mike Finigan (Sydney Martha Associates); readers were Dale Romeo (Sydney Mines Associates) and Mae Rowe (Sydney Associates). The prayer of the faithful was read by Norma Blinkhorn (Sydney Mines Associates) and our Eucharistic Minister was Harry Blinkhorn (Sydney Mines Associates). A time of fellowship was enjoyed after the taping. Fr. Bill Burke gave a wonderful Homily reflecting on the 125th Anniversary of the Marthas and the work of the Sisters over these many years. He also spoke about the charism of Gospel Hospitality, and how it is lived and shared by the Martha Associates.

MARTHA ASSOCIATES UPDATE



On May 24, 2026, Terena Francis from Paqtnkek First Nation, will facilitate the **BLANKET EXERCISE WITH ASSOCIATES** in the East. Many of our Martha Associates, including myself, have never experienced the Blanket exercise, so we are very much looking forward to this event. After our Fall retreat in September of 2025 entitled "Healing the Divide: a Journey of Reconciliation" presented to us by Sr. Donna Brady, many Associates expressed the desire to learn more about the process of reconciliation and about our responsibility to be part of the healing. We believe participating in the blanket exercise is another way for us to learn and grow and be aware of ways to "Heal the Divide".

As I close this update, I want the Sisters to know they are always in our hearts and in our prayers. Congratulations on your 125th Anniversary and thank you for the many ways you have shared Gospel Hospitality with us, the Associates, and the many people with whom you collaborate every day. A blessing for our Sisters: God Bless,

**THE LORD BLESS AND KEEP YOU;
THE LORD MAKE HIS FACE TO SHINE UPON YOU
AND BE GRACIOUS TO YOU;
THE LORD TURN HIS FACE TOWARD YOU
AND GIVE YOU PEACE. AMEN**

(NUMBERS 6: 24-26)

**Julia Townsend,
Director Martha Associates**

*Mass for Shut Ins,
May 9, 2026*



MARTHA CHARISM MINISTRY

*Did
you
know?*
CSM FACTS

You may have heard that every religious community has their unique CHARISM that shapes the life and mission of the Congregation. You also may have heard the Marthas identifying Gospel Hospitality as their Charism. And you also may have wondered what it all means.

Charism, a particular Spirit, guides where the Congregation members live, who they serve, how they work, and the causes to which they commit themselves. It is a living gift that continues to grow and find new expressions in response to the needs of the times.

The Martha Charism is Gospel Hospitality — a radical welcome that creates spaces beyond the physical, where the inherent dignity of every person can be recognized with generosity and compassion and where difficult realities and the other are embraced.

Understanding that this "Martha Charism" does not belong to the Marthas alone and is meant to evolve, to grow, and to be shared, the outgoing leadership in 2019 encouraged future leaders to deepen their understanding of this Charism and involve laypeople in exploring innovative ways to share it.

In 2020, the new Council established a Charism Study Group that brought together sixteen Marthas, religious, and laypeople from diverse backgrounds, ages, vocations, and lifestyles.

Marielle Assad and her husband, Barry, who had been friends of the Marthas since their university days, participated as a married couple. Over two years of regular Zoom gatherings, the group explored and reimagined the Charism of Gospel Hospitality for the future. Following this process, Marielle was invited to bring the new

Charism Ministry into life. In the summer of 2023, she began in her role as **Martha Charism Ministry Coordinator**, with Dr. Debbie Castle as facilitator. Drawing on the Study Group's reflections, they identified key priorities, including making the Charism of Gospel Hospitality more accessible and visible, fostering collaboration, responding to contemporary needs, and creating welcoming spaces for encounter. Since then, the ministry has focused on developing projects in these areas while building a strong foundation for its future growth.

Why is Charism important?

"In a secular context, I describe Charism as something different from an innate talent or skill that you might simply be born with. It is a kernel planted in your heart — a spark that, once recognized, can light the world on fire. It shapes the way you see the world and how you respond to it. It is part of why you are here: to make the world better in a way only you can. It is marked by service to the common good and motivated by love. These Charisms can take many forms, such as communication, bridge-building, healing, leadership, community-building, teaching, wisdom, creating beauty and many more. All are equal in importance. I firmly believe that everyone is born with these service graces. They are not reserved only for the holy or the religious. Imagine if we all discerned, recognized, and lived out our own Charism, our own gifts — how much better the world could be."

~Marielle Assad

MARTHA CHARISM MINISTRY

*Did
you
know?*

CSM FACTS



What does the Charism Ministry do?

“We dream, imagine, explore, and create new possibilities. I get to discover new ways to express and “set free” the Charism, helping it continue to grow and evolve. Each project is an opportunity to share the Martha story in new and meaningful ways and to invite others into the Charism. Our work is about making Gospel Hospitality visible, tangible, and alive in today’s world, helping it take root around us.”

~Marielle Assad

- ◆ The first major project of the ministry was **Charism Conversations**, a series of focus groups designed to make Charism and Gospel Hospitality more accessible. Participants from a variety of backgrounds reflected on community needs, explored Gospel Hospitality, and helped create language that is meaningful and relevant today.
- ◆ Marielle has also developed activities for children and families, including story times, scavenger hunts, and an upcoming **Children’s Charism Ministry Activity Hut** in St. Theresa’s Garden. Through books, activities, and “Dragon Quests,” children will be introduced to the Martha Values in engaging and creative ways.
- ◆ The ministry has played an active role in the Congregation’s **125th Anniversary celebrations**. Projects have included a children’s activity book, an interactive museum exhibit, a library book donation initiative, and Gospel Hospitality bookmarks and stickers.
- ◆ The largest project so far is ***Sister Garden: 8 Tiny Plays About Gospel Hospitality***, a **community play** written and directed by Laura Teasdale. Presented free of charge, it shares the story, values, and Charism of the Sisters of St. Martha and invites audiences to experience Gospel Hospitality in a fresh and meaningful way.

LIVING THE MARTHA SPIRIT

A Different Way of Life



Religious (consecrated) life began in the 3rd and 4th centuries with early Christians withdrawing to the desert to live lives of solitude or small communities seeking a deeper commitment to prayer, simplicity, and discipleship. While formal religious life emerged during this period, its roots lie in the Gospel and the example of Jesus and his disciples, who lived in community, shared resources, and dedicated themselves to God's mission.

As society changed and the Reformation reshaped Christianity, religious life evolved to meet emerging needs. We find many inspired stories of founders and foundresses who were compelled to "do something" in response to the needs they experienced around them. Teaching, nursing, and social service communities arose, actively challenging the status quo and empowering those they served.

Although Religious Life has continually evolved over the centuries, the past 70 years (since the Second Vatican Council) have witnessed especially profound changes, as the history of many congregations, including the Marthas, demonstrates. What remains unchanged, at the core of

CONSECRATED LIFE

One of the 8 Martha Values

Experiencing the beauty and meaning of religious life, we proclaim this life as gift to the Church and world. We invite and welcome new members, new expressions of Martha Associates and share our life with young people.

this way of life is the challenging work of **building community**, a work that begins with creating space within oneself to welcome others. Hospitality lies at the heart of this vocation.

“ Hospitality means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy... ”

Henri J. Nouwen, *Reaching Out* (p. 33)

In her thesis on *Religious Life as Leadership*, Sr. Joanne O'Regan, CSM, remarks that, because discipleship is lived within community, it requires an openness to others and a commitment to hospitality, rooted in the conviction that every person is created out of love:

To be a Martha means "to be part of a group, where one member is in ministry, all are there in spirit and support. A core aspect of this life in community is a commitment to prayer, both communally and personally, from which comes the strength and courage



LIVING THE MARTHA SPIRIT

A Different Way of Life



Living in Community now and then.



to be actively engaged in creating the space where hope can be found." (p.7)

This alternative way of moving through the world, in which all possessions are held in common and life is shaped by the commitments of poverty, chastity, and obedience, stands in contrast to prevailing social norms of power and possession. It challenges the transactional logic that characterizes much of life under late capitalism, offering instead a model grounded in service, community, and mutual dependence.

RELIGIOUS LIFE...

BEFORE VATICAN II COUNCIL

- ◆ *Traditional habits worn at all times.*
- ◆ *Strict rules and highly structured community life.*
- ◆ *Limited role in decision-making.*
- ◆ *Focus on teaching, nursing, and convent life.*
- ◆ *Greater separation from the wider world.*

AFTER VATICAN II (1965)

- ◆ *Habits often simplified or made optional.*
- ◆ *More flexible community life and rules.*
- ◆ *Greater participation in leadership and decisions.*
- ◆ *Wider ministries, including social justice and pastoral work.*
- ◆ *Increased engagement with society and lay people.*

This way of life is not for everyone, but perhaps living the Martha Charism of radical Gospel Hospitality will speak to those who may not be called to religious life but are seeking a life of vocation and purpose.

"Our call to discipleship, and by extension to life as community, is a call to be in leadership, to be people of hope, and to extend an invitation to be in right relationship. Our call to discipleship is a call to life of mission."

Religious Life as Leadership, thesis by Sr. Joanne O'Regan, CSM, 2014

LIVING THE MARTHA SPIRIT

VOCATION AND THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

Over the last few years, I have been asking myself “is there really a crisis of vocations, or are we experiencing a paradigm shift in understanding vocations in a different way, perhaps an entrepreneurial spirit?” This question comes to me as I observe so many young people, my own nieces and nephew included, who are seeking to live their lives in ways that are meaningful, innovative, and not confined to a conventional path. Authenticity is key, being true to who you are, and living your life on those terms.

Could it be that this apparent crisis is not so much a decline in vocations but rather a profound shift in how we perceive and embark on vocational journeys - towards an entrepreneurial spirit that redefines the very essence of what it means to seek our truest self?

When we think about an entrepreneurial spirit, we typically think of being innovative, risk-taking, with a desire to find new paths for success, whether in a business sense or through social enterprise. Viewed through the lens of a religious vocation, this spirit can be seen in individuals who approach their vocation with an innovative mind-set, seeking to find ways to meet the needs and expectations of a rapidly evolving world. Unwilling to settle for the way things have always been done, following a pioneering spirit, these faith seekers are open and enthusiastic to forge more fluid, less fixed paths as they follow this journey in faith.

Religious Life has always made room for risk taking, for pioneering, and forging new paths that may not have always conformed to the expectations of the larger community. This for me is where the two meet, the entrepreneurial spirit and the religious

vocation. In the context of an Integral Ecology, the call to be authentic, to forge paths of mutuality and relationship, and to see all creation as the manifestation of a loving Creator, the vocation to religious life today demands an entrepreneurial spirit to help shape the emerging future, while rooted in the mission of Jesus.

Collaboration, community-building, and inter-connectedness are at the heart of our lives as religious and so too in the heart of an entrepreneur. Could it be then that if we embrace what is possibly a paradigm shift and see vocations broadly through the lens of the entrepreneurial spirit, we open ourselves to transformation and discover endless possibilities for growth, systemic change, and community building, that religious life has always strived towards?

*An abbreviated version of an article by Sister Joanne O'Regan, CSM "Life of Vocation requires a Paradigm Shift" published in *Vocations Canada* in September 2024.*



MARTHA MEMORIES IN OBJECTS

SYMBOLS OF RELIGIOUS PROFESSION



SYMBOLS OF RELIGIOUS PROFESSION
The Crucifix - received at First Profession
The Rosary Beads
and - received at Final Profession
Silver Ring
Signed Formula of Religious Profession
Constitutions of the - the Rule of Life
Congregation

For many religious sisters who do not wear a habit, a cross, ring, or other meaningful symbol serves as a visible sign of their faith and vocation.

These cherished symbols express a commitment to prayer, service, and community while reflecting a long-standing tradition in a simple and contemporary way.

The Marthas have a few distinctive, symbolic pieces of jewellery that they always wear.

RING

From 1905, the Martha ring was conferred on all Sisters when they made perpetual profession. An unsigned and undated historical article on the Congregation states, "It may be said here that the first rings were made at Eastwoods, New Glasgow. After consulting the Sisters, Mother (Faustina) asked to have the letters *I.H.S. engraved on each ring."

*IHS is a traditional Christian symbol representing the name of Jesus.



Source: *And Martha Served* by James Cameron, page 333

MARTHA MEMORIES IN OBJECTS



CRUCIFIX

Originally, the crucifix was attached to the rosary as part of the Martha habit. Later, it was replaced on the rosary by the Martha medal, and the crucifix was then worn around the neck on a black cord (later on a silver chain). With the change to contemporary dress, the crucifix OR the medal could be worn.

Source: *And Martha Served* by James Cameron, page 333



MEDAL OF ST. MARTHA

The Congregation obtained a medal of St. Martha from Sisters of St. Martha of St. Hyacinthe, Quebec. Its inscription, translated from French, is: "*Holy Hostess of Jesus, obtain for us your zeal. Love of him banished trouble*". When the rosary beads were no longer a part of the Martha habit, a sister could wear either the Martha medal or the silver crucifix. Some Sisters wear a newer version of the medal, adopted in 2004.

Source: *And Martha Served* by James Cameron, page 332



GREETINGS FROM MARTHA JUSTICE MINISTRY



It's always exciting to see and hear the gifts that Spring offers. When we pay attention to the life emerging around us, the diversity and variety are quite awesome! The vibrant green of the forests and fields, the colourful varieties of flowers, the happily chirping birds and croaking frogs all offer unique and precious expressions of life. If we take this in, we can feel our spirits lift, knowing we are part of something so deeply wonderful. We have to notice, though. We have to be PRESENT, ATTENTIVE and STILL.

In the utter chaos that imposes on our awareness in these challenging days, that STILLNESS is a necessity. For me, it speaks to the importance of CONTEMPLATION to respond with our full selves to the needs of our world, so that the heaviness doesn't weigh us down.

In our justice ministry and work, the contemplative spirit lets us know that we are not alone in the struggle for justice and that it is part of the larger movement of the Spirit. That helps when we understandably feel overwhelmed. It also provides us with a foundation to act with deep compassion and love, even when fear, anger, and violence dominate.

Through Martha Justice Ministry, we are so privileged to deepen our presence to the world as we engage in our work for social and ecological justice and reconciliation, along with so many wonderful partners. As you will read in this Standing4Justice, there are so many wonderful expressions of this in the work we are part of with many others.

I hope you find this a source of inspiration in your lives and work. Peace and Blessings,

*~ Darlene O'Leary
Coordinator, Martha Justice Ministry*





EVERYDAY PEACEBUILDING IN ACTION

Early this February, we were thrilled to have a chance to share some of the work of Martha Justice Ministry, the Sisters of Charity Federation UN NGO, and our partners with a very special visitor to Antigonish.

StFX Coady Institute invited Elizabeth Spehar, United Nations (UN) Assistant Secretary General for Peacebuilding and Peace Support, to talk about *“The Future of Multilateralism for Peacebuilding.”* Following her keynote speech, MJM and the Sisters of Charity Federation UN NGO hosted a panel, *“Everyday Peacebuilding: Connecting the Local and Global – Grassroots Communities Implementing the UN SDGs.”* The panel was moderated by Darlene O’Leary and included short presentations

by several Marthas and their community partners followed by the response from the Assistant Secretary General.

Read more about the event here:
<https://www.themarthas.com/martha-justice-blog-detail.php?19>



Elizabeth Spehar (second from the right) with Sisters, Coady Institute and CSM staff.



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CRC JPIC NATIONAL GATHERING

Participants from across the country gathered at the Villa Saint-Martin in Montreal for the Canadian Religious Conference Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation (JPIC) National Gathering from May 2-4.

We were happy that Martha Justice Ministry Core Group members Joanne Tompkins, Olga Gladkikh, and Amy Brierley were able to take part in this gathering, along with Darlene, who was part of the event planning group.

The theme *“Integral Ecology: What lies hidden beneath the surface?”* explored integral ecology as our lived reality of interconnectedness and as an intersectional lens that brings together the threads of our ministries and work together.

It was wonderful to be with over 70 participants from across Canada representing

religious congregations and faith-based partner organizations working in justice, peace, ecology, and reconciliation. There were lovely prayers and ceremonies based on the integral ecology theme to ground our conversations, which were organized in a synodal process moving from listening to dialogue to discerning. The process concluded with consensus on a collective action we can take together.

We were so grateful to be part of this rich time together! Thanks to Sr. Danielle Julien, Sr. Margo Ritchie, Fr. Alain Ambeault and all of those who organized, facilitated, and participated in the event.



MJM Core Group member Joanne Tompkins, speaking to other conference participants



REGIONAL WELL-BEING CONFERENCE

Martha Justice Ministry Core Group members Sr. Donna Brady and Joanne Tompkins, along with Sr. Claudette Gallant, participated in a wonderful event in March organized by the Cape Breton-based organization, *Raising the Villages*.

The Regional Well-Being Conference in Mabou brought together community organizations from across Cape Breton and the rest of Nova Scotia to talk about their experiences of rural community resilience. Elder Dolena Poulette from We'koqma'q welcomed participants and Rosie Sylliboy from Mawita'mk led a birch bark ceremony. Community organization representatives shared about how they have come together to work through challenges and to celebrate culture and creativity.

Martha Justice Ministry was happy to be a sponsor of this event.

<https://www.facebook.com/RaisingtheVillages>



MEETING WITH JAIME BATTISTE



Martha Justice Ministry Core Group members had an opportunity to meet with our MP Jaime Battiste at his Antigonish constituency office in March.

We were happy to have this chance for a discussion with MP Battiste and to raise issues of great concern to us. These included support for the Turn Debt into Hope campaign, a Guaranteed Livable Basic Income, meeting federal climate commitments, respect for Indigenous rights in federal project development, and increased efforts by Canada to ensure an end to the bombing in Gaza along with urgently needed access to humanitarian efforts. We appreciate MP Battiste's openness to hear our concerns and his helpful responses!



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EARTH DAY PEACE VIGIL

This past Earth Day, April 22, we had a lovely gathering around the Marthas' Peace Pole, a symbol of the commitment the Marthas have made to living and promoting peace and non-violence.

The gathering was a vigil focussed on peace with earth and all life. We shared prayers and poems, as well as a reflection using icons of species that are at risk of extinction. We held in our hearts those people, species, and ecosystems that are being destroyed by wars and pollution.

It was a time to share our love for and interconnection with all life, to celebrate the amazing diversity of creation, and to pray for healing in our hearts and our world.



HEALING THE DIVIDE

The 2nd annual *"Healing the Divide: A Journey of Reconciliation"* series took place over three Sundays in April.

MJM Core Group members, Sr. Donna Brady, Olga Gladkikh, and Joanne Tompkins led a group of about 15 participants in each session in an engaged learning process on reconciliation and right relations. The title of the workshop series is based on a song written by celebrated Mi'kmaq songwriter and musician, Morgan Toney. In his song, entitled *"Healing the Divide"*, he examines how the processes of colonialism have created the unequal divide between Indigenous and Settler communities in Canada today.



Read more on MJM blog: <https://themarthas.com/martha-justice-blog-detail.php?20>



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MARTHA GROWERS UPDATE

Since 2024, Martha New Growers Program has been in transition period to facilitate restructuring of the program and exploration of innovative farming techniques, ensuring it can better serve the community.

This spring, we've dropped the "new" in the name of the program, which will now be known as the "**Martha Growers**"! This better reflects this 5th season with our farmers, **David Matheson** and **Meghan Johnny**. Also, we are so pleased that they are taking on the roles of **Farm** and **Program Managers**, helping guide both the farm and the broader program!



This has been a cool and wet spring which makes for slow growing vegetables. But, it also gives us an opportunity to slow down and make some farm improvements, like a greenhouse renovation project. As we move into summer, we see sunnier days ahead and are grateful for that!

~Meghan



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MARTHA GROWERS UPDATE

It has been a soggy start to the Martha Growers season this year, but there's lots of good produce coming along.

David and Meghan are working hard with their summer students to get the fields,

greenhouses, and hoopouses filled with seedlings, some of which are now well established and ready for harvesting. The produce will contribute to the Lochaber Growers Food boxes and also will be for sale at the Antigonish Farmers Market.

The first workshop of the season took place on Saturday, May 30. **Stay tuned for more!**

We are looking forward to another great growing season with David and Meghan!

Martha Growers
Free!
GARDENING WORKSHOPS

Saturday
MAY 30, 2026
2-3 pm

MEGHAN & DAVID
WILL TEACH ABOUT:

- MAKING TRANSPLANTS
- PLANTING SEEDLINGS
- DIRECT SEEDING
- PLANT SPACING

Sisters of St Martha @
Bethany Property (Barn area)

For more information or to RSVP,
contact David and Meghan at
marthasnewgrowers@gmail.com

All are welcome!





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MJM RESOURCES

ORCIE INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

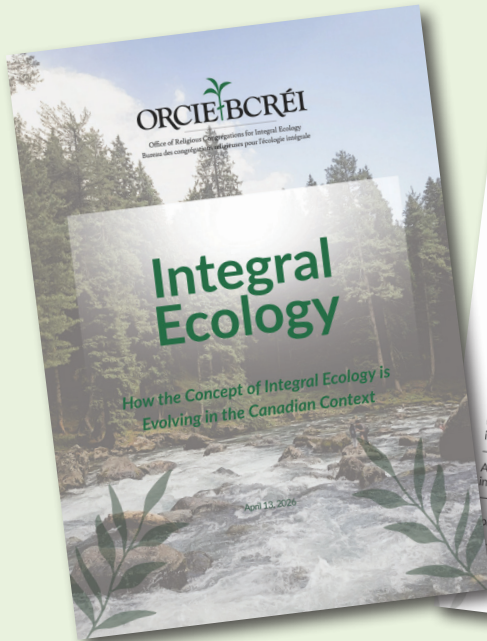


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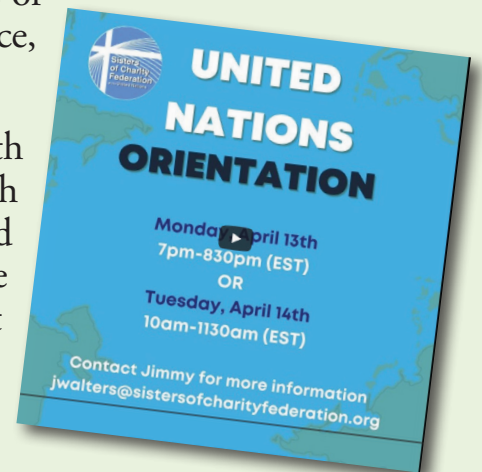
Darlene had the pleasure and privilege of working with Sr. Sue Wilson, CSJ, on a paper for ORCIE called “Integral Ecology: How the Concept of Integral Ecology is Evolving in the Canadian Context”. This paper and a shorter executive summary can be found on the ORCIE website:

<https://orcie.org/resources/>

SISTERS OF CHARITY FEDERATION UN NGO

Jimmy Walters, the Sisters of Charity Federation UN NGO representative, offered two UN orientations this April. They provided helpful information about the structure and work of the UN and the priority issues of the NGO, including homelessness, peacebuilding, climate justice, and Indigenous rights.

We continue to be part of the Federation UN NGO with Darlene as the Marthas’ Liaison, supporting the work through signing joint statements, participating in Commissions, and bringing global issues to our representatives, particularly the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the commitment “to leave no one behind” – bringing local actions and global commitments together!



[Click here](#) for the SCF UN Orientation 2026 on YouTube!



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MJM LIBRARY

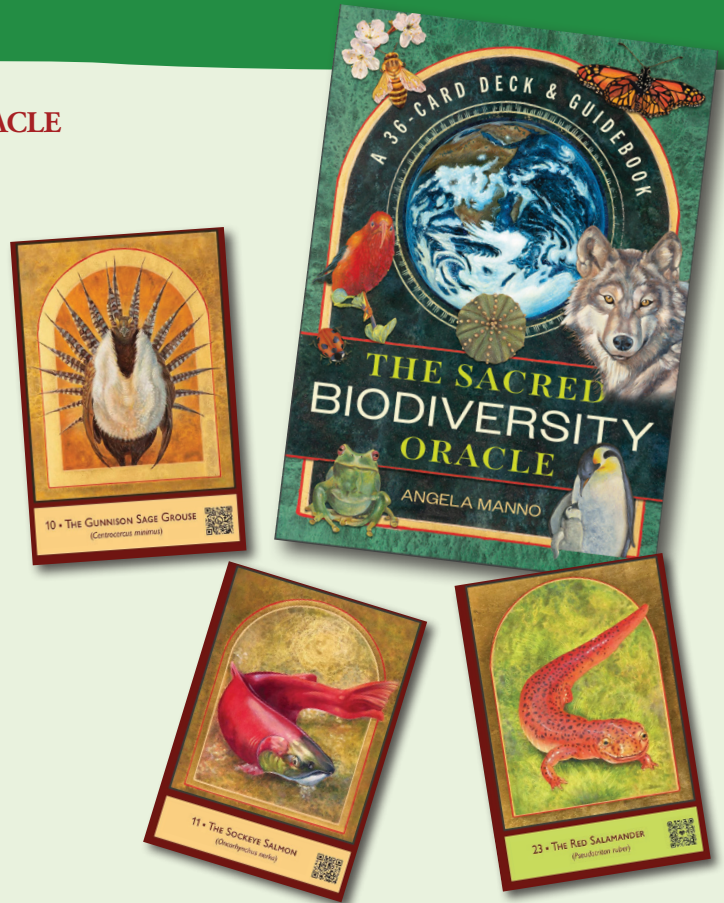
THE SACRED BIODIVERSITY ORACLE

BY ANGELA MANNO

The Sacred Biodiversity Oracle is a beautiful collection of 36 individual cards designed by artist Angela Manno in the form of icons.

The cards depict the images of life forms that are at risk of extinction, ranging from Sumatran Orangutans to Andean Flamingos to Grey Wolves. The cards come with a booklet that offers meditative reflections to offer presence to the wondrous biodiversity of creation in the hope that it will foster a sense of connection with these creatures and all life on our precious planet.

This is a beautiful resource for prayer and education on integral ecology!



TAKE ACTION!



The Turn Debt into Hope Canadian campaign has wrapped up with over 72,000 signatures being submitted to the federal government calling for them to take action on international debt relief. And the good work to end unjust debt and support climate finance will continue!

Through ORCIE, we actively supported this campaign along with lead organizer Kairos, and partners like Development and Peace. Follow ORCIE for updates on our next steps for this and other campaigns: <https://orcie.org/>



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#pocketofhope



www.themarthas.com

CSM MISSION STATEMENT

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