

# Our Life as Mission

NEWS FROM MARTHA  
LEADERSHIP TEAM



*Sisters  
of  
St. Martha*

Issue 3  
November 2020

*“Standing together in undaunted hope”*



## CELEBRATING OUR PATRONESS IN A PANDEMIC

The Feast of St. Martha, celebrated on July 29<sup>th</sup>, is perhaps one of the most important dates in our Martha calendar.



On this day, we celebrate this woman of God, our patroness who is a model of *Gospel Hospitality*. This is also the day that we *stand* together to renew our vows of *poverty, chastity, and obedience*, that are at the centre of Consecrated Life in the Church. July 29, 2020 arrived amid the COVID-19 pandemic and it was not possible for us to gather as a whole. Sr. Brendalee Boisvert, Congregation Leader, continued the tradition of giving a reflection to the Sisters. This year, she was only permitted to sit in St. Martha Chapel, by the organ, deliver the message, and then leave. The written text was sent to those who live in local communities in Antigonish, Sydney, Sydney Mines, and Inverness.

In our founding story, we recognize the invitation to *stand* that our 15 Founding Women courageously had accepted. This year, 120 years later, we continue to *stand* wherever we find ourselves, renewed in our Mission as *Sisters of St. Martha*, inspired by God's graciousness, to *hear, embrace and respond to the cry for Gospel Hospitality*.

## RETURN BACK TO THE OFFICES

Over the summer, the staff at Mount Carmel Administration Centre has transitioned from work-from-home format to back to the office.



The area around Mount Carmel is currently under construction and the entrance to the building is temporarily moved. Please exercise caution. In the future, we will have a much more user-friendly entrance to Mount Carmel for both people and vehicles.

*As the future Bethany Centennial Garden is still an active construction zone, we remind everyone to adhere to the signage on site and keep in mind the limited parking on the property.*

All necessary adjustments were made in the building to follow Public Health protocols for COVID-19. We ask all visitors to Mount Carmel Administration Centre to follow the following new regulations:

- ◆ If you need to see anyone at Mount Carmel please **make an appointment**.
- ◆ When you come in, our secretary will announce your arrival to the person with whom you have an appointment.
- ◆ You must **sign into the logbook**.
- ◆ Visitors (excluding sisters) by pre-arranged appointment and the staff members they are meeting are required to **wear masks upon their arrival and while meeting** in the Conference Room adjacent to main entrance unless medical reasons exempt this mask requirement.

## CONSTRUCTION UPDATE

The construction of the Bethany Centennial Garden is still on track for the projected date of completion in the Fall of 2021.

On September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020, the 99<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of Bethany Motherhouse building in Antigonish, NS, Sr. Brendalee Boisvert, the Congregation Leader, unveiled a sign announcing the name of the new project on the site of the former Motherhouse building: Bethany Centennial Garden. The Congregation released a press article and an accompanying booklet describing this project in more detail.

The first phase of the Bethany Centennial Garden project construction will end before winter arrives and, in spring 2021, we will hopefully see new plants making their way into the ground as part of the second phase.



## A PEEK INTO THE CONSTRUCTION ZONE

On September 29th, the former Bethany Chapel steeple found its resting spot in the new garden.



After a 3-hour long move involving a crane, a truck and many skilled workers, the steeple was safely moved. Parts of this move have been recorded and are available to see on our Facebook site.

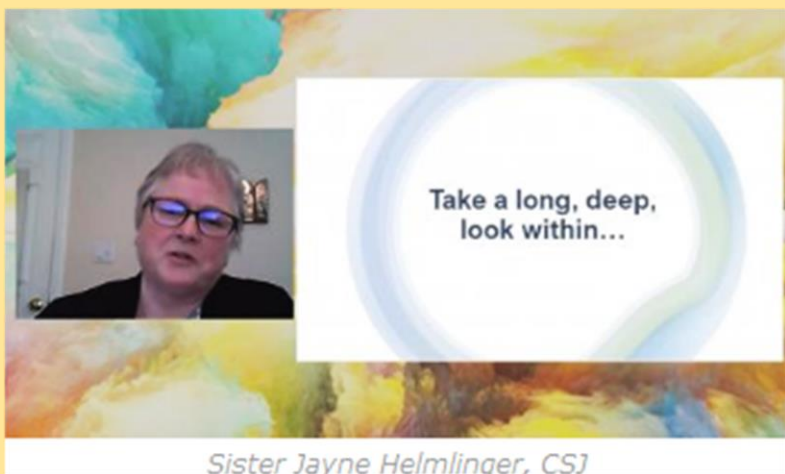


By early October, all three statues and the facing of the former chapel altar made it to the new space.



The 2020 LCWR Assembly took place virtually on August 12-14, 2020.

Sr. Brendalee Boisvert, the Congregation Leader, participated from the office at Xavier Community. She and over 900 participants have gathered in a virtual zoom room together!



Some technical glitches troubled the first session of prayer and group sharing but were fixed quickly. The Presidential Address, *Vulnerability Borders and the Long Notes of Religious Life*, was given by Jayne Helmlinger, CSJ. It will come out in the fall *Occasional Papers* which goes to each of our local communities. The talk was followed by group sharing of 9-10 people in a Zoom room. It worked out very well and certainly widened the circle of Gospel Hospitality for

Sr. Brendalee who really appreciated meeting the group and having some honest sharing. Both the presentation and the sharing were quite vulnerable. There was a session on grief as a catalyst for transformation and hope: *Abiding God be with us as we abide with God*. This too was followed by small group sharing. On the last day, the participants heard from LCWR regarding various topics such as an update on vocations to Religious life, the challenges of the pandemic, racism, climate change and concern for the future of Religious Congregations.

## CWR CONFERENCE ONLINE

On September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Sister Joanne O'Regan and Beata Gesicka, CSM Communications Coordinator, attended an online mini-conference of the Communicators for Women Religious (CWR).

This annual conference, usually held in person, provides members an opportunity to reconnect with friends and colleagues, to share ideas, to exchange information, and to learn more about how to do their work in a more efficient and effective way. This year, because of the pandemic, the conference was virtual.

The keynote speaker, Sr. Teresa Maya, CCVI spoke on the challenges facing women religious and communicators. Pointing to the difficult times of the pandemic, she suggested turning it into an opportunity for transformation and creativity. She encouraged the communicators to use their imagination to showcase, in a meaningful and prophetic way, the issues important to each congregation. Other themes at the mini-conference were *Repurposing Content Across Platforms* and *Spirituality of Communications*. It also featured, for the first time, CWR awards presentations and recognition of member milestones.



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Warren Lake, NS

Have you ever been to Spain? I do not know how the season of Autumn presents itself in that beautiful country. I do know, however, how Autumn/Fall gently lands on us and makes her presence felt in Canada. I have lived in many provinces in our great land and still believe that Nova Scotia provides our souls and our senses with the richest feast of beauty!

Now how did I begin in Spain? As I was walking around our beautiful property, feasting on the blaze of color of the leaves and the sky, listening to and being touched by the breezes, hearing the water ripple in the pond, smelling the rich earth and gazing in wonder at the harvest brought about by our New Growers for our nourishment, I thought that St. Ignatius of Loyola may have had the same experience in his environment. This may have led him to develop the exercise called the Application of the Senses.

This exercise is presented as the retreatant contemplates the Incarnation. The Word of God is, of course, presented to us in Scripture; it is also spoken through human relationships and through the beauty of creation. The Word is also alive and active as we embrace the change of seasons and celebrate the action of God in the transformation of our earth, and of ourselves. The gift of our senses allows us to see, touch, taste, smell and hear this transformation taking place. It does not matter if we are in Spain, or in Antigonish, God speaks in various ways and has given us all we need to stand in awe at the sound of God's voice. As I walk, I say with Annie Dillard who ended her book, *The Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* with the words: "My right foot says 'Alleluia' and my left foot says 'Amen'".

~Sr. Claire MacNeil  
*Martha Ministry of Spirituality*

*I do not understand the mystery of grace; only that it meets us where we are, but it does not leave us where it found us" ~ Anne Lamott*

The quote by Lamott got me thinking about the mystery and wonder of God's grace that is freely gifted to us to strengthen us and to sustain our spirits as we continue to maneuver through these challenging times! It is now that time of year when we watch the leaves change into their golden colors, then fall back to the earth, signaling that winter is not that far way! We are not sure what challenges are ahead for all of us, but I am certain that God's grace will see us through! As Martha Associates, we look forward to this time of year, getting back together again after a summer break! The difference this year, however, is that our summer break has become the 'COVID break'. Like most people, the Associates have not been able to meet in person since March. We have been fortunate to use electronic means to be in touch with each other, as well as the phone and the snail mail! Slowly, over these many months, Public Health protocols and guidelines have been devised so that groups of varying sizes would be able to begin to come together again safely. And so, treading gently, some of our Associate groups have begun meeting once again.



Martha Associates



Associate members of the Sydney and Glace Bay groups, met for the first time since March, on October 14, 2020. Eleven Associates and one journeyer braved a wild, wet and windy evening to come together in person at the Bethel Presbyterian Church Hall in Sydney. Although we were masked and social distanced from each other, the joy we felt at being together again was clear!! We took some time to express how we have been managing through this 'COVID world', and how we had a sense of hope for the future! We were delighted to have an email update from Sr. Florence Kennedy on our Sisters of St. Martha. We are grateful that they have been well throughout these times. We continue to pray for all the Sisters!

Our Associates in Lethbridge are also coming together in person. A small number of Associates met on October 15, 2020 and plans are underway to meet with the Lethbridge Associate group via ZOOM. We may need extra prayers to ensure that this meeting is a success as I seem to be allergic to technology!!! I am hoping that we will have a plan in place for each of our Associate groups to meet by the end of this year. It is essential that everyone feels supported, safe and comfortable. This is an evolving process. Blessings to all!

~Julia Townsend  
*Martha Associates Director*

## DID YOU KNOW?

### CSM FACTS

Sisters of St. Martha have fully embraced the value of **COLLABORATION** as a commitment *to not do alone what can be done together*. As the Congregation Leader, Sr. Brendalee Boisvert collaborates with the following two organizations:



**Canadian Religious Conference (CRC)** was established in 1954. Every two years, the organization calls the Leaders of Religious Institutes and Societies of Apostolic Life to a General Assembly. The Assembly provides opportunities for members to meet and share common practices and challenges. The participants seek a common focus across Canada to foster the vitality of Religious Life in an effort to encourage the building of solidarity in our common mission of proclaiming the Good News of Religious Life in the Church and in Canadian society.

Sr. Brendalee Boisvert has served as Atlantic Representative on the CRC National Executive Council since 2016. The Council meets 3 times a year. Her second term was meant to come to conclusion at the May 2020 General Assembly. Because of the pandemic, the Assembly was cancelled. As changes to the Executive Council can only be made at the CRC Assembly, all members on the Council had their terms extended for one more year. Brother Louis Cinq-Mars, OFM, finished his mandate in October 2020 and vice-president, Sister Francine Landreville, CND, became CRC President. The 2021 Assembly will be held virtually.



The **Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR)** assists its members "personally and communally to carry out more collaboratively their service of leadership, fostering dialogue and collaboration among religious congregations, developing models for initiating and strengthening relationships with groups concerned with the needs of society, thereby maximizing the potential of the conference for effecting change" (from *LCWR Mission Statement*).

As Associate members of LCWR, we have been privileged to have two members of the Leadership Team attend the yearly conference. The themes addressed in the last two years were: *Imagining Leadership in a Global Community* (2019, Scottsdale, AZ) and *God's Infinite Vision: Our Journey to the Borders and Beyond* (2020, virtual). These gatherings provide the Leadership Team with a wider worldview on current issues facing society and Religious Life in general. LCWR also provides opportunities for addressing issues of concern with a corporate voice by taking action on resolutions approved at the National Assembly.



## INTRODUCING DARLENE O'LEARY

On September 1<sup>st</sup> of 2020, we welcomed Darlene O'Leary as our new, full-time Coordinator of the Martha Justice Ministry!

Darlene comes to us with a rich educational and work background. She has a MA in Theology from Regis College and a PhD in Theology with an Ethics concentration from Saint Paul University. The integration of social and ecological justice is a passion of hers and one reason she was attracted to this position. She is experienced in working with politicians and religious and grassroots groups on strategies to eradicate poverty in Canada. For the last 4 years, she was employed by *Citizens for Public Justice* in Ottawa, ON as a Socio-Economic Policy Analyst.



## A MESSAGE FROM THE MARTHA JUSTICE MINISTRY

A few months into my role as Coordinator of Martha Justice Ministry, I am both grateful for and inspired by the work that has been done and the relationships that have been fostered throughout the years of this ministry. We are in a time of such challenge and uncertainty, with the Covid-19 pandemic affecting us all in so many ways, with rising social tensions, and with the climate crisis looming. However, we continue to work, pray, and live out of hope. Right now, we are called to be in solidarity with Sipekne'katik First Nation and Mi'kmaq fishers striving



to live out their Treaty rights to a sovereign fishery. We work and pray for an end to all violence, in the hope that governments and non-Indigenous communities work with Indigenous communities in friendship to build right relationships and ensure the flourishing of all communities and the conservation of species. These are deep challenges. We invite you to continue to pray with us as we walk the path of reconciliation, justice, and love of creation together!  
~Darlene O'Leary, Coordinator,  
Martha Justice Ministry





## NEW GROWERS END OF YEAR UPDATE

Saturday, October 24th was the last time at market for our New Growers, Olivia Gowan & Andrew McGillicuddy, after a very successful year. An end of the year celebration was held on Tuesday, October 20th

Olivia and Andrew, some of their family, and former program participants have gathered at Fatima Cottage for our year end celebration. It could not happen at Parkland Antigonish with all Sisters present, unfortunately. We are hoping to return to that practice next year.



Andrew and Olivia receiving New Grower Program certificates from Jen Greenberg.

As for the near future, Andrew will be starting work with livestock in Wallace Bay and Olivia is enrolled in the Plant Science Diploma program at the Dalhousie Agriculture Campus.

Jen and David Greenberg listening to Darlene O'Leary, Martha Justice Ministry Coordinator.

Next summer they are hoping to grow food somewhere in the province depending on where the opportunity is.



Current and former Martha New Growers Program participants had a chance to chat during the gathering.



## SEASON OF CREATION

This year, Martha Justice Ministry held our first Season of Creation Gathering in St. Theresa's Garden on September 27<sup>th</sup>.

The Season of Creation is an ecumenical celebration that brings together groups and churches from across the world to share in contemplation, gratitude, and action for all of creation. It takes place from September 1<sup>st</sup> to October 4<sup>th</sup>, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, a small ecumenical group gathered on a beautiful day to share in prayer and celebration, reflecting on the beauty and gifts of the natural world. The group offered rich sharing about how we connect with the Spirit through nature and the importance of creation care. We will continue to grow in deepening our love of creation through future gatherings, networks like the Global Catholic Climate Movement, our New Growers program, and ongoing care for this land and all of creation.



Season of Creation Gathering in St. Theresa's Garden

## THE "ORANGE SHIRT DAY"

Orange Shirt Day, September 30<sup>th</sup>, is an annual day of solidarity and remembrance in recognition of the harm done to Indigenous children in residential schools in Canada.

The day is inspired by the story of Phyllis (Jack) Webstad who, at 6 years of age, started school at Mission, BC with a brand new orange shirt that her grandmother bought for her. The shirt was very special to her, but when she arrived at school, she and the other children were stripped of their clothing. She never saw the shirt again. On Orange Shirt Day, we wear orange to remember the mistreatment of Indigenous children forced into residential schools, where their traditions and language were taken, and where many suffered abuse that has impacted generations of families. We stand with Phyllis and other survivors to acknowledge this trauma, and to voice our solidarity for Indigenous rights and healing.



The Leadership Team and Martha Justice Ministry Coordinator



## A LETTER IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE SIPEKNE'KATIK FIRST NATION

As we strive to live out of right relations and deepen our understanding of being Treaty people, we invite you to read our letter to Chief Mike Sack of Sipekne'katik First Nation and to reflect on the questions that follow.

Dear Chief Sack,

Martha Justice Ministry of the Sisters of St. Martha, Antigonish, unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq, wish to express our support for the people of Sipekne'katik First Nation and the ongoing efforts to live out your Treaty rights to a sovereign fishery.

We are deeply concerned about the escalating violence directed at Mi'kmaw fishers in your community who are exercising Treaty rights. We stand with you in urging the federal and provincial governments to ensure the safety and well being of your community as nation-to-nation discussions proceed in fulfilling the rights affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada in the 1999 R. v. Marshall decision.

We will call on the Nova Scotia and Federal governments to honour the Peace and Friendship Treaties and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and to work at building right relations among communities.

We are continuing to pray for peace and friendship among communities across Mi'kma'ki. We are striving to deepen our understanding of the original treaties of this land and the responsibilities of being Treaty People through ongoing solidarity with Mi'kmaw communities and Indigenous communities throughout Turtle Island.

In peace and solidarity,  
Martha Justice Ministry Core Group

*What does it mean to be in right relationship with the Sipekne'katik First Nation and Mi'kmaw communities at this challenging time?*

*In what ways can we deepen our understanding of Treaty rights and foster friendships with local Mi'kmaw communities to grow a sense of trust and solidarity?*



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**CSM MISSION**

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