

# Our Life as Mission

NEWS FROM MARTHA  
LEADERSHIP TEAM

*Sisters of  
St. Martha*



Issue 10  
April 2023

*"Standing together in undaunted hope"*



## REJOICING TOGETHER



Three weeks before Ash Wednesday I had the opportunity and the gift of spending three weeks on Canonical Visitation with forty-nine Sisters of St. Martha living in Parkland Antigonish. Those twenty-one days were filled with deep listening, sharing in relation to our Martha way of life and the Gospel invitation to pour out our extravagant love on one another and those with whom we live and meet.

It was an invitation to live the core of our charism...Gospel Hospitality. One of the deepest learnings for me during those sacred days was that we, as Religious Women, as Marthas, are learning how to walk in darkness together. We are being called to seek light... to seek wisdom as we live our lives as Mission.

Together, we will rejoice as we welcome the dawning of a new day when we will see, believe, and experience that Jesus Christ is Risen! Darkness will be embraced and transformed by the new Easter Light!

~Sr. Brendalee Boisvert, Congregation Leader,  
Excerpt from Lenten letter 2023



## SR. CATHERINE ANN MACGILLIVRAY HONORED

On Tuesday, February 28<sup>th</sup>, Sr. Catherine Ann MacGillivray received the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal in recognition of her work in general, and during the pandemic in particular. Sister Catherine Ann manages the Spiritual and Religious Care Department in Saint Martha's Regional Hospital in Antigonish.



The Spiritual and Religious Care Department team members accompany patients as they go through serious illness and sometimes death, offering emotional and spiritual support, and sometimes also helping to access financial assistance. If necessary, they coordinate religious services that meet the needs of patients such as contacting their clergy person, helping to respond to sacramental needs, and the ministry of prayer. Their services are directed at people of all faiths or no faith, the poor and the marginalized. You can read more about Sister Catherine Ann's work in St. Martha's Regional Hospital in Antigonish, NS during the pandemic in the OLAM Newsletter, Issue 5, July 2021. It is also accessible [in pdf format here](#) or on our Martha Stories page: <https://themarthas.com/martha-stories.php>.

*Congratulations Sr. Catherine Ann! What a wonderful honour!*

## ANNUAL SC FEDERATION MEETING



Sisters of St. Martha are busy preparing to co-host the annual Sisters of Charity Federation Leadership Meeting in June.



The annual Sisters of Charity Federation Leadership Meeting will be co-hosted this year by the [Sisters of St. Martha of Antigonish](#) and the [Sisters of St. Martha of PEI](#). 75 women religious representing 13 congregations in Canada, United States, and South Korea will gather June 12<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> on the campus of St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, NS and travel to

Prince Edward Island on June 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>.

The women religious in attendance will represent approximately 5000 members worldwide, living and working in 28 countries, committed to the Gospel and to serving as advocates and witnesses, bringing about systemic change for the elimination of poverty.

# STORYBOARDS

On March 13<sup>th</sup>, members of the Storyboard Committee celebrated at a luncheon a big achievement for the group: the completion of the Storyboard Project. The history of the 123-year-old Congregation is told on 13 colorful information panels placed throughout the Bethany Centennial Garden, each offering a peek into a particular congregational ministry.

The Storyboard Committee first met in the fall of 2019, but the idea of telling the story of the Congregation in a visually compelling way had surfaced long before that, while the Bethany Motherhouse was still standing. It came from the conversations among the Marthas about the desire to somehow share their story and values with the community, as well as preserve the memory of the building, a significant town landmark.

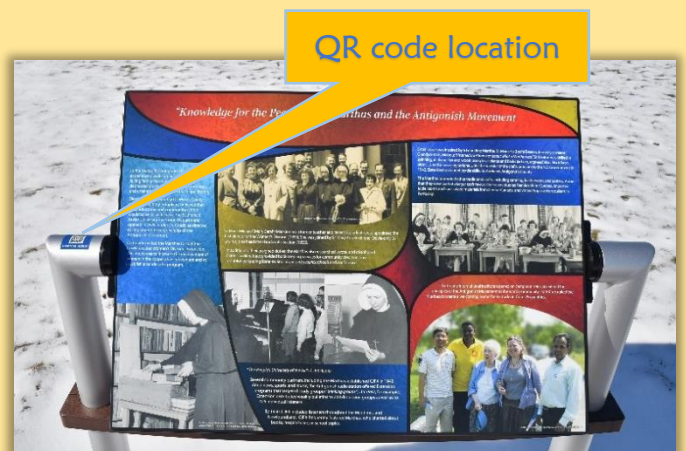


The concept of “telling a story” was a compelling one to a group of community members invited to a Visioning Session with the Sisters to brainstorm the possible uses of the Motherhouse site. This very productive meeting led by *Colliers Project Leaders* resulted in a list of goals and priorities for the new development. One of the recommendations was to incorporate commemorative signage. The group agreed that it was important to preserve the history of the Sisters of St. Martha, understanding that the site shouldn’t become a memorial, but rather a commemorative space: a welcoming garden for contemplation and reflection.

*Viridis Design Studio* embraced the idea and fit the interpretive panels into the overall design of the space. Then, the Storyboard



Committee embarked on a long journey that involved archival research and honing the information into manageable story bites. Each person on this Committee offered their particular insight and expertise to make this project a success. Finally, the Committee engaged *Atlantex Creative Works* to create the captivating design of the boards. The company produced and installed these wonderful, colorful panels. The boards are complemented by a set of online slides offering an in-depth look at the information presented. Most have a sticker with the QR code placed on the side (see image below) that leads to a specific PDF slideshow on a [dedicated Martha website page](#), providing more historical details and context for each board.





# 100 YEARS OF LIFE

On January 24th, 2023, Sister Margaret Landry celebrated 100 years of life.  
It was a blessing to be able to celebrate with her!



Sr. Margaret Landry with Sherri Penny and Sr. Florence Kennedy



Sr. Margaret Landry

## MARTHA APPRECIATION CONCERT

In January 2023, in gratitude for CSM financial support, Inverness County Cares (ICC) offered a Martha Appreciation Concert: they provided talented musicians and singers to entertain the Sisters, other residents at Parkland Antigonish as well as the Leadership Team of the Congregation.

Inverness County Cares (ICC) is a local charitable organization, founded in 2012 and based in Inverness County, NS. ICC works in partnership with Chalice.ca, a Canadian charity, based in Bedford, NS. Chalice provides guidance and assistance to help ICC with the Kawambwa Project in Northern Zambia. The Project assists albino and visually impaired students at St. Mary and St. Odilia schools in Kawambwa. The Sisters of St. Martha have been supporting this project financially for the past 3 years.



Colleen MacLeod

On January 18<sup>th</sup>, after a lovely concert by five talented musicians, Colleen MacLeod, an ICC member, presented a power-point presentation that showed clearly the great work being done by the organization at schools in Zambia.



Inverness County Cares members, January 2023



# PARKLAND ANTIGONISH 5<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, Parkland Antigonish, the home to most of the Marthas, celebrated its 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Five years ago, on March 1<sup>st</sup> 2018, fifty seven Sisters of St. Martha living in Bethany Motherhouse moved to a brand-new facility, Parkland Antigonish. It is a very special community, born of a relationship between the Sisters of Saint Martha and Shannex RLC Ltd, the company owning and operating Parkland Retirement Living homes.



Staff, managers, and Parkland residents, gathered in the Multipurpose Room of the residence on March 1<sup>st</sup>. The official celebration began with a staff appreciation speech by the outgoing Parkland General Manager, Candace MacKenzie. It was followed by warm words from Jason Shannon, the President of Shannex, who emphasized the special relationship his company has with the Sisters of St. Martha and the great responsibility Shannex assumes to bring the best quality of life possible to seniors for many years to come.



Candace Mackenzie, Jason Shannon and Sr. Brendalee Boisvert



In her speech, Sr. Brendalee Boisvert, the Congregation Leader, thanked the Parkland and CSM Staff for being there every day to assist the residents. She was also thankful for the Parkland residents and acknowledged their capacity of forming a caring and welcoming community. She then praised the managers on both Shannex and Martha Teams that work tirelessly *“to maintain the dream of more than just a building that hosts 80 people but of the creation of a residence that people are beginning to call home.”*

The official part of the celebration ended with a very special candle lighting ceremony. Sr. Sandra Cooke led a prayer called *Remembering, Rejoicing, Moving Forward*. Those gathered were drawn into the candle service with a simple, gentle song calling to peace. Representatives of Parkland community, including a few Marthas, lit ten candles, while remembering and cherishing many happy moments in the residence. The celebration ended with culinary delights and friendly conversations.



*Remembering, Rejoicing, Moving Forward*  
Prayer service



*Did you know?*  
**CSM FACTS**

In 1986, at the request of Bishop Donald James Reece, the Sisters of St. Martha were called to the Caribbean island of St. Kitts where they were missioned for 21 years.

While considering article #6 of their Constitutions that asks the congregation *“to work for the development of persons, for the improvement of human and social conditions, with special concern for the poor”*, Sisters recognized the need to take practical steps to broaden their global vision. In the newsletter from May 1986, the leadership further explains their purpose for establishing this new community:

*“This request calls forth from us an approach an attitude which gives priority to the development of Christian community based on Gospel values with the preferential option for the poor. Because we will be in a different country and future, we believe we must try to learn from the people and to understand and affirm them in their cultural values. We believe that as Marthas we offer the gifts of our charism and desire to journey with the people in loving service, joyful simplicity and welcoming presence.”*

The pioneer Sisters, Antoinette Chiasson, Anita Driscoll, Joan Fultz and Genevieve MacDonald, participated in a series of cultural workshops meant to help them navigate a different culture upon arrival. They landed in the capital city of Basseterre on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1986, and were housed in what



The pioneer Sisters, 1986

## ST. KITTS MISSION



became known as Christopher Community. They settled into servicing the parishes of Immaculate Conception in Basseterre, Holy Family in Molineux and Sacred Heart Parish in Sandy Point.





Initially, ministries included adult faith development, education of children and youth, parish home visiting, and home health care but later expanded to encompass pastoral work in the prison, elder care in homes and the hospital, assisting in various groups such as the Catholic Association of Women in Action and Peacemaker Youth Group, as well as being strong advocates for local social concerns. 13 Marthas worked on the island while the mission was active. The final group left St. Kitts in 2007, thereby completing the 21 years of dedicated Martha service.



Sr. Joan Walker preparing food to be taken on a visit to the local prison.



Sr. Genevieve MacDonald teaching children

## ST. KITTS MISSION



The plaque from the Parish Council with an outline of the island of St. Kitts.

### BRINGING TO CLOSURE

#### ✧ **Christopher Community, St. Kitts**

Sister Marion Sheridan made her final visit to Christopher Community, as Councillor for Community Living and Service, in January. Time was spent with Sisters Clotilda McIntyre and Agnes Beaton on beginning the process of grieving as they worked on gathering important historical and archival materials to be sent home to Bethany. As well, they gathered with the priests and some parishioners, helping one another to move toward dealing with the impending loss of the Marthas from St. Kitts. Part of the grieving took the form of putting in place what needs to be done between now and July 31, 2007 when all our ministries there will be ending.

An excerpt from a 2007 Newsletter



# VOICES FROM THE MINISTRIES

Martha mission on the island of St. Kitts closed 16 years ago but sisters who served there have vivid memories from their ministry. We are sharing in this issue a few of their voices, some written during or shortly after their stay on the island, some with the perspective of 20 years gone by since their return.

## THE FIRST YEAR

The pioneer sisters at St. Kitts were very busy, working long hours. Sister Joan Fultz was engaged in religious education, Sisters Antoinette Chiasson (parish visitation) and Anita Driscoll (home health care) worked with the sick, shut-ins, and the elderly; and Sister Genevieve MacDonald taught grade 6 in the parish school. In August of 1987, Sr. Joan Fultz, during her brief holiday from work at St. Kitts, spoke to the Martha community in Antigonish about the first year of the mission on the island. She painted a portrait of St. Kitts' social issues in the late 1980s. An article covering Sr. Joan's speech entitled "Sister Returns from St. Kitts" appeared on August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1987, in The Casket newspaper. Below are a few excerpts describing some areas of work of the first Marthas on the island:

- ♦ Another adjustment for the sisters, Sister Fultz explained, was having to live face to face with suffering. "The experience has helped us to grow spiritually", she said. "Seeing how the people face suffering with great faith, praising God every day for life, has been the most salutary lesson for us all."
- ♦ An area of concern for the sisters is the elderly. Sister Fultz explained that many of the elderly people are abandoned and have no family to care for them. Sister Driscoll visits these people in their small shacks.
- ♦ Sister Fultz spoke of the religious education the sisters are providing. She has had a number of adults taking instruction for Baptism and she has also trained a class for First Communion. "Also Sister Antoinette recently completed a most successful at home retreat with 12 people," Sister Fultz noted.



Sisters Joan Fultz & Genevieve MacDonald

## Sister Returns from St. Kitts

5, 1987  
The Casket — August 5, 1987  
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## LEARNING

Sr. Brendalee Boisvert's reflection presented here was written not long after she returned from the island, with the memories still fresh in her mind. It is the first time we share her reflection with the public. She was missioned on St. Kitts between 1990-1994 as Coordinator of Religious Education for the parishes on the island of St. Kitts and assisted with Religious Education on other islands in the Diocese.



## Sister Brendalee's "Snapshot" of What She Learned from the People of St. Kitts, W.I.

It is with joy that I attempt to share with you a little part of my journey as a Sister of St. Martha. The snapshot that I have chosen is an account of the nearly five years I spent on St. Christopher's Island, better known as St. Kitts, in the West Indies.

We have a small community of Marthas there who strive to live simply among the people. We each offer the gift of our ministry, trying in our own way to respond to the critical needs we see each day. We strive to be a compassionate presence, open to receiving the gift of these faithful people who know a lot about suffering and living with few possessions.



The Kittian people have asked us to live among them witnessing as a community that the Christian way of life is possible. Our sense of celebration and support of one another are seen as signs of God's saving love in their midst. Our specific ministries include adult faith development; education of children and youth; pastoral ministry with particular emphasis on parish visiting; home health care and recently, social work.

The island of St. Kitts seems tiny, when flying over it you can see the whole island. The Kittian people are most welcoming and generous. Many who may not be able to share much materially readily share the riches of their vegetable gardens or the fruit of their many trees—bananas, mango, papaya and more. Along the streets you meet people who find time to sit and "lime." "Liming" is a word for wasting time just chatting about life in general. These people are gifted at this, and help us to let go of our attachments to schedules and timed conventions.

As a white person in St. Kitts, my experience of belonging to a minority was at times overwhelming, but always an experience that things we take for granted in our North American culture are not the norm for the world. I had much to learn about using my



## VOICES FROM THE MINISTRIES *continued*

North American standards and expectations on a people who had their own way of seeing, doing and saying things. As a catechetical coordinator for the island and eventually for the seven islands of this diocese, this was a constant challenge and struggle for me.

Participating in the West Indian liturgies has left its mark deep in my soul. There everyone sings. Those who have wonderful voices carry those who are less gifted. The end result is one chorus of men, women and children raising their voices in praise. Choruses are sung before gatherings and people are moving to the wonderful rhythm that seems to dare anyone to stand still. The Sunday Liturgy is their time to be nourished, and the length of time is no problem. They hunger for the Word to be proclaimed and broken open in a dramatic fashion. Children are welcomed and involved in the liturgies, from carrying up art displays of Sunday school classes to re-enacting the Gospel. One of the most meaningful moments for me happens at the sign of peace. The Church erupts and everyone goes around the whole church extending peace and blessing and singing well known choruses of praise.



St. Christopher Community



In St. Kitts I discovered many inner resources and valued even more the experience of listening to others share their faith and experience of God. I grew more able to take delight in small things. So often in our culture we are led to believe that "bigger is better." There in St. Kitts, you feel called to share what you have: a good soul song or concert, a cool swim with friends, visits from people on the island and from family and friends. I learned, too, to hold on to my possessions with a much gentler grip. When you live and work beside people who have so little, people who claim the street as home, something happens to your world of things.

I became deeply affected by the gift of water as I watched people travel in early morning or late at night to use a common tap. Here they would fill up their buckets for drinking and cleaning for the day. Some lather up right there to save carrying buckets home. Even today, I find it difficult to see or hear water being wasted. Every time I shower, I give thanks to God for the privacy of our shower stall.

I marvel as well at other areas that powerfully affected me. I feel I am a better person for having walked alongside these people of colour, and their song and gift of music still soothe my soul and draw me into fond memories.

– Brenda Lee Boisvert, csm





## FEELING AT HOME



Sr. Clotilda McIntyre & Sr. Theresa Parker

**Sister Theresa Parker** served in St. Kitts from 1992 to 1998. She remembers that from the moment she arrived she felt at home with the people of St. Kitts. During her 6 years on the island, she helped with Religious Education at St. Joseph's and St. Theresa's schools. Patrice Mills, a high school teacher, and Sr. Theresa developed a high school group called *Peacemakers*. They undertook such endeavours as cleaning the school yards and beaches and selling sandwiches at the market to help with off-island visits.

For a few years, she worked with a group in Prison Ministry – their work involved visiting the city of Basseterre's prison to bring in church service, provide various supplies (depending on the needs), offer food on special occasions, and talk to the prisoners. Later, Sister Clotilda McIntyre arrived and took on the Prison Ministry. This move gave Sr. Theresa time to teach English to the people coming from the Dominican Republic to work in the tourism sector in St. Kitts.

The devastation caused by tropical hurricanes are vivid memories for Sr. Theresa, while learning to grow banana trees on this lush island on the Caribbean is one of her many delightful memories.



One of Sr. Theresa's banana trees



Hurricane devastation in Basseterre



## LITTLE THINGS

**Sr. Mary McMahon** nursed the elderly in their homes, visited regularly residents of a local nursing home, and held health clinics weekly in the city of Basseterre and the village of Conaree between 1996-2002. Her work, as well as the work of all other Marthas on the island, was a pioneering effort to improve daily lives of Kittians.

During regular parish visitations she would determine what people's needs were, whom and how she could help best. The needs were often basic, such as giving a bath or improving the condition of the feet. Foot care was lacking, yet it was essential for so many. To be able to do the best job possible, Sr. Mary brought supplies from Canada and had asked Sisters in Antigonish who were familiar with foot care to give her some useful tips. She also attended to hospital patients who were sent home but still needed support. At the mobile clinic she used to set up every week, people would stop by to get their blood pressure or sugar level checked, or sometimes just to chat. She did little but meaningful things: washed people's clothes or helped finding a crib for a mother who had none.

Sisters of St. Martha at St. Kitts tried to be "pockets of hope" for people, giving them a sense of their dignity and worth.



Sisters of St. Martha who served on St. Kitts, 2007



An elderly woman & Sr. Mary McMahon, 2001.

Sr. Mary remembers dearly the woman pictured in the image above. She was blind and always praising and thanking God for what she had. She was surprised people thought she had nothing - she felt she had so much because God was looking over her. The image shows her singing, thanking God for all the blessings. Sr. Mary was touched by the amazing, simple, and unshakable faith of this woman and so many other Kittians she met. She visited individuals living in poverty and enduring unbelievable hardships, yet most were able to find joy and gratitude in their hearts. Witnessing their faith in the face of so little was life giving.

She still thinks about the people with whom she established relationships, sometimes friendships, and feels grateful for her time on the island.





## MARTHA MEMORIES IN OBJECTS

On August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2007, the community of friends, parishioners, colleagues, and Kittian dignitaries joined together for a Eucharistic celebration of thanksgiving and appreciation. Many gifts were generously offered to the Marthas, including certificates and money donations from the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Catechists, and the Grief Support Group, as well as plaques from the Prison Ministry, the Catholic Association of Women in Action, the Senior Choir and the Parish Council.



A unique gift in the CSM Heritage Collection is a "Thank-You" Book, full of photographs and personalized messages from parishioners, addressed to the sisters who lived, worked, and prayed in St. Kitts. The book was given to Sr. Theresa Parker at the time of St. Kitt's closure.

Over the course of several weeks, the book was made accessible at the Immaculate Conception's Parish Centre Office to parishioners who wished to share their memories and good wishes.

The cover design features a carved wooden turtle surrounded by geometric designs that upon close inspection reveal vegetation such as dried bark and sticks, grasses, and cinnamon sticks.



In a reciprocal gesture of generosity, the Sisters of St. Martha gifted the parishioners with a week-long workshop dedicated to spiritual development. In July 2008, 86 parishioners attended the sessions presented by Sisters Brendalee Boisvert, Donna Brady

and Theresa Parker. This return to the island concluded with vibrant Eucharistic celebrations and Sister Brendalee singing a song she had written for the people of St. Kitts: "Freedom; A Kyrie".





Mark Finigan became a Martha Associate in 2012. He and his wife Michelle met the Marthas through a family member, one of the founders of the Martha Associates group. They had only a vague idea of what to expect but stayed and became journeyers because of the welcoming community of the happy sisters who, in their eyes, seemed to have always made the world a better place. For Mike, being a Martha Associate provides a community to share and grow in his faith, and to be continually amazed at the exceptional deeds done by humble yet exceptional people. He offers readers a reflection on his journey to faith and the way he has been living it.

## RIPE

It was an unlikely occurrence that moved me to become a Catholic, considering the lengthy and dramatic history of conversions we've all read about, say, getting to know the saints. Not that I am a saint.

Maybe the time was ripe. Maybe I was ripe. I've heard that before. Unwelcomely the first few times while trying to explain how, never mind becoming a Catholic, I became an all-fired-up Christian in the blink of an eye. It does happen, by the way. One minute you're this and the next you're that. It does happen. One minute all you could care about in the world is the next party, the next good time, the next cheap thrill, and the next minute you're picking up a tiny leatherbound New Testament that's been fitted under an uneven leg on your kitchen table by a former tenant to keep your tea from spilling. You're bored, maybe hungover, flipping through it under a blinking, distracting fluorescent light in your cheap basement apartment at the end of a disregarded street on the outskirts of a forgotten town.

You flip and scan and flip and scan and then light upon a curious verse beginning, *"Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavily burdened, and I will give you rest."* You sit and stare. Everything, including your mind,

seems to have gone quiet. You blink. You sit. You sigh. You read again. The words, typed in red, leap off the thin little postage stamp page and soar and spiral, now in glinting gold through the air and rear up and shoot you right between the eyes. And you look up at your basement window that has been smashed by the twins upstairs playing hockey. The window is taped along the jagged seams. It's so dirty you can't see through it. And it's beautiful. You look back down at the page. And guess what? Your whole life just changed.

You keep reading and find yourself giddy, like Scrooge on Christmas morning, wanting to dance across the spotty, colourless carpet, past a sink full of greasy dishes and cold grey dishwater, to open the dungeon door and let some air in, and perhaps some more light if that's even possible. And you behold a sunset like you've never seen before. A full, blazing orb, plunging, shimmering, setting fire to the horizon beyond the bootlegger next-door's backyard full of busted, rusting, wheelless cars and you sense a new beginning, and you don't know what your next move is going to be, but you know that it is going to be extraordinary!





It was a Socratic moment too, really, because what makes this moment real is the fact that you are sure you knew this all along, knew God, knew Jesus, knew the Holy Spirit, but just had to remember. Just had to open your eyes. “You were ripe,” they said, much later. The cynics. “Your circumstances put you in the right frame of mind. It was spectacular yes, but predictable.” And looking back, okay. I was ripe. But so what? The lepers were ripe. The blind beggars were ripe. The Apostles, John the Baptist, Mary Magdalene, ripe, ripe, ripe! Anyway. That was springtime 1984. And before long I went back to being me.

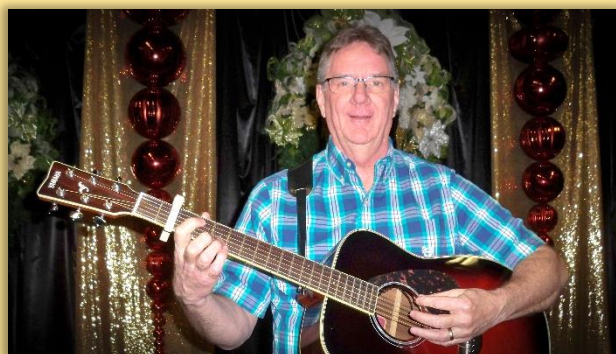
I got a lot of help from some church people after I had my experience. The United Church folks. They gave me a summer job, they gave me the opportunity to lead a few Sunday Services (after my first year of university), and when I went back to school intent on becoming a minister, they gave me a part-time job cleaning the church. Where the mice and I had some great conversations alone with God on Friday nights. But, yeah, I went back to being me. And in 1991 graduated as a teacher. Changed my mind about becoming a United Church Minister, forsook all those elders that supported me. A decision I sometimes keenly regret. But life leads you down many roads and sometimes you regret one thing and then thank God you didn’t do it because you just wound up in circumstances that you are sure were ‘meant to be’. Don’t get me started. In 1992, Easter, I was confirmed in the Catholic Church. (I just deleted the 851-word part about how that happened, and it was good too.) I watched a movie

with my father that subtly criticized the Church (*The Godfather Part II*) and I went home that night and joined the RCIA program up the street in Halifax. Under the direction of Fr. Lloyd O’Neil.

I’ve nothing but respect for my old United Church, but I feel that home is here. The Catholic Church was the church I was never part of but was surrounded by, entrenched in, all my life growing up in #11 in Glace Bay. Where all my buddies learned about The Sacraments, went to Catechism Classes, were confirmed (and came home dressed to the nines, full to the brim with chocolate milk and cake, Oreos, you name it!). Went to first communion. Crossed themselves when they swore. I knew all about it and I knew nothing about it. I was on the outside. Left on the steps.

I feel I would be lost without the Sacraments. Without The Virgin Mary. Without communion every Mass, without the Rosary, the stations of the cross, the crossing myself when I swear or pass a graveyard or wish a piano would fall on somebody’s head from the clear blue sky. Dare I say, it keeps you in the game. Anyway. Here I am. RC. Mule-headed, glib, arrogant by times, deaf. Lazy. And stunned. A lot of work for God. And we haven’t even gotten to what I started to write about. The music. When you’re mule-headed, glib and arrogant, altruism isn’t your strong suit and if you’re going to work for God, well, it’s going to have to be doing something you don’t have to be dragged kicking and screaming to do.





In Easter 1992, the very moment I was confirmed and took my first communion – well not my first, but officially my first, I marched right over to the choir who sang at the Easter vigil and joined. I loved them. But they told me to come back next year. After the summer. Fair enough. But I guess I was playing somewhere else one day, a party or something, and the priest, Fr. O’Neil, saw me and asked me to fill in for the choir over their summer vacation. What? And what was I going to say? No? And see, this was 1992. This was before you could look up the words or the tunes to any song on earth on the internet. And I knew nothing. I didn’t know a single Catholic Hymn. Not one! And I would have to play four that very Sunday! Four!

Fortunately, my old man married a Catholic. Muriel. My stepmother. And she knew plenty of Catholic hymns. All I had to do was call her and get the tunes. By then I had the words in *The Catholic Book of Worship* that Fr. O’Neil lent me. But I couldn’t read music. So, I called Muriel and she sang to me over the phone. I had a good head for tunes then. Didn’t rely on digital memory. I had it all right up there. You sang something to me over the phone, two three times, I had it. Still didn’t stop me from throwing up every week in the bushes on my way to play at 11 o’clock Mass.

That was 31 years ago now. I’ve belonged

to choirs the whole time. No matter what was going on in my life. Good or bad. In Halifax, in Alberta, and now here in Cape Breton. And I still do lots of solo stuff, where I get to pick the songs and show off a little.

To play in front of an audience or a parish requires a confidence bordering just this side of hubris. This I learned from playing at seniors’ homes, where they can’t abide a shy singer. They want entertainment, not a babysitting job. And my wife Michelle will be the first to tell me when I get too full of myself. (And maybe she should be reading this as I write!) I still get nervous when I have to do Mass for Shut ins. It’s getting better, but early on, I would be in full panic mode for three days before the Mass would tape for TV. Anyway.

There are many, many opportunities to play for... I like to think... for God. Mass, weddings, funerals, Mass for Shut Ins, Stations of the Cross, Martha Associates; as a teacher, I used to have a Catholic School student band who played at all the school Masses. Retreats. Prayer meetings. Singing some good gospel music too, some bluegrass gospel, spirituals. Lent opens itself wide to the great Gospel tunes like “Nearer My God to Thee”, “Walk That Lonesome Valley”, “Just a Closer Walk with Thee” and “Wayfaring Stranger”. I can’t even imagine stopping until, well, until I’m called home.

Yeah, I might have been ripe. Yeah. And there could have been a stack of losing 50/50 tickets or a box of Jello under that uneven table leg. But there wasn’t.

~Mike Finigan,  
Sydney / Glace Bay Martha Associates





## GREETINGS TO YOU ALL FROM MARTHA JUSTICE MINISTRY



*Greetings to you all!*

*The season of Lent is well underway, a time that offers opportunities for rich spiritual deepening and reflection. It can be a personal journey of faith reflection on Jesus' time in the wilderness and connecting our lives with Jesus' struggles. It can also be a season*

*that lends itself well to the work of social and ecological justice, solidarity with those*

*most marginalized, and support for the work of reconciliation with Indigenous communities. Jesus' journey, after all, was a journey of justice grounded in the love of God and all creation.*

*I hope that you find some inspiration in the work that we share in this issue of Standing4Justice and that it offers you a way of connecting more deeply in the journey of justice through the Lenten Season.*

*Peace and Blessings,*

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







## MJM LENTEN BOOK STUDY

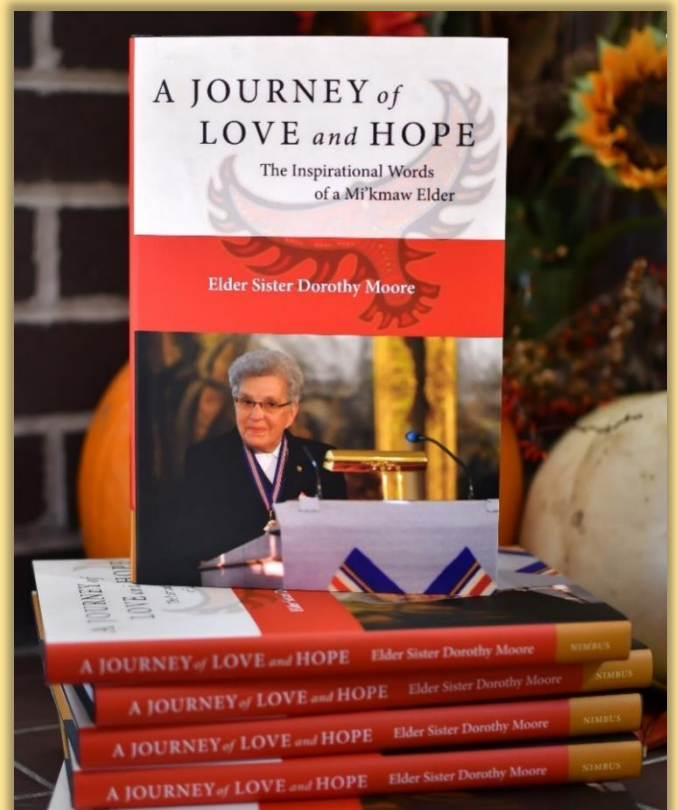
As part of our Lenten journey, Martha Justice Ministry held a Lenten book study throughout the month of March, facilitated by Sister Donna Brady and Darlene O'Leary. The study focussed on the new book by Elder Sister Dorothy Moore, *A Journey of Love and Hope: The Inspirational Words of a Mi'kmaw Elder*.

Sister Dorothy, a Mi'kmaw Elder and a Sister of St. Martha of Antigonish, has committed her life to Mi'kmaw education, preserving the Mi'kmaw language, and building bridges of respect between Indigenous and Settler cultures.

This book brings together the story of Sister Dorothy's remarkable life and work, through the presentations she has given through the years on Mi'kmaw language and culture, education, spirituality, prayers, and experiences of racism.

With about 20 participants, our sessions began on March 5 with a viewing of a documentary about Sister Dorothy that shares personal stories of her journey as a Mi'kmaw leader and educator and a Sister of St. Martha. Family members, fellow educators, Mi'kmaw leaders, and Sisters of St. Martha shared their funny and touching stories and their deep admiration for Sister Dorothy in the film. It was a great way to enter into the study of her book, which continued through each Sunday in March.

We were grateful to have Sister Dorothy join us for part of our last session, and she graciously responded to the questions



and reflections shared by participants. We all ended our study feeling enriched by the experience of shared learning and opening of our hearts to Sister Dorothy's story and work for reconciliation.

We encourage you to pick up a copy of Sister Dorothy's book. Copies are available or can be ordered locally at the Curious Cat Tea & Books on Main Street in Antigonish.





## UN COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

This February, Darlene O'Leary and Sister Marion Sheridan were able to participate in the Commission for Social Development (CSocD61) at the UN in New York.

The theme for CSocD61 was *"Creating full and productive employment and decent work for all as a way of overcoming inequalities to accelerate the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."*

Martha Justice Ministry and the Sisters of Charity Federation were among the 1000 international organizations and individuals to sign the NGO Committee [Civil Society Declaration](#), offering recommendations and calls to action on the theme.

It was wonderful to have this introduction to the Commission, starting with a Civil Society Orientation and Networking Session on February 5<sup>th</sup>. Darlene and Sr. Marion attended high-level panels, side events, and civil society briefings throughout the week. Also, on February 10<sup>th</sup>, they participated in the day-long [Civil Society Forum](#), which offered several interesting panel discussions on the theme and called for a new World Social Summit in 2025 to build on the progress of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and develop a renewed social contract with social protections to ensure no one is left behind. The importance of engagement with civil society on the theme was very clear, particularly relating to issues involving youth and persons with disabilities.



*"It was my first opportunity to attend the Commission in person as the Marthas' UN NGO Liaison with the Sisters of Charity Federation NGO. It was a wonderful experience of learning and connecting."*

~Darlene O'Leary



Sr. Jean Quinn during  
NGO Civil Society Orientation





## UN COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT *continued*

Sr. Marion and Darlene also had a chance to meet with Sisters of Charity Federation NGO Representative Jimmy Walters, and outgoing representative Sister Teresa Kotturan, along with many other civil society representatives.

They felt very blessed to stay with the CND Sisters, who were gracious and welcoming hosts. It was a very rich and full week at the Commission.



Sr. Teresa Kotturan and Darlene O'Leary



Sisters of Charity Federation NGO Representative Jimmy Walters with Darlene O'Leary



To learn more about Civil Society Forum [click here!](#)





## COP15 TAKEAWAYS

In December, Darlene O'Leary had the great opportunity to participate in the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (COP15) of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in Montreal.

This conference was a chance for states that have signed on to this UN Convention to come together, along with civil society organizations, to develop and commit to a plan to protect the biodiversity of this planet. As the outcome of the conference, over 180 countries agreed to what is being called the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#), a plan that sets out commitments to protect land, water, and diverse species from now to 2030.

The protection of biodiversity is essential for the flourishing of all life, including humans, as we are all part of the sacred web of life. As the [World Wildlife Fund](#)



[Living Planet Report 2022](#) states, monitored wildlife populations around the world have declined an average of 69% since 1970. This decline ranges from plants to birds, reptiles, and mammals. Currently, one million plants and animals are threatened with extinction. So, the urgent need to halt damage and restore nature over the next decade means that countries had to commit to a strong framework for action.



Multifaith Coalition with the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Elisabeth Mrema

At COP15, while countries were negotiating this plan, civil society organizations were able to have a voice in a number of ways. Martha Justice Ministry was there as part of the Society of St. Coloumban Delegation that was a key organizer of the Multifaith Coalition at the event. The Coalition submitted a [recommendation document](#) ahead of the event that Martha Justice Ministry and other faith groups signed. The group had a

Read more here: <https://www.biodiversity.faith/policy>





## COP15 TAKEAWAYS *continued*

Faith Pavilion at the event where they were able to gather for workshops, prayer, and conversation. They also met with the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Elisabeth Mrema, to discuss the importance of the role of faith communities in working to protect biodiversity and provide support and advocacy for governments to act.



Darlene with Laudato Si' Movement members.  
L to R: Agnes Richard (MLSM Canada), Darlene,  
Caroline Kiiru (LSM Kenya), and Anna Johnson  
(LSM US)

Darlene also participated in a **March for Human Rights and Biodiversity** with faith communities involved in COP15, including the Laudato Si' Movement, Centre Oblat, Development and Peace, and the Archdiocese of Montreal. It was a very cold day for the march, but hundreds of people came together in a spirit of care for creation.

Find more information and links to reporting and reflections on COP15 on [Darlene's blog](#).

Following on COP15, further actions will be taken by faith networks that MJM is part of, including **reaching out to Environment and Climate Change Minister Steven Guilbeault** to ensure Canada follows through on our COP15 commitments.

As well, Darlene will be sharing the important experiences and outcomes of COP15. She had an opportunity to present on COP15 with the Sisters at Parkland Antigonish in January and at a Religious Studies class at St. Francis Xavier University in March.



Although the conference is over, the work to protect biodiversity and implement the Global Biodiversity Framework will continue, and Martha Justice Ministry will be part of it locally, nationally, and globally.





## JEM WEBINAR

On March 4<sup>th</sup>, Joint Ecological Ministry (JEM) hosted a webinar called “What Next? Religious Acting on Biodiversity and Climate Change”.



This webinar was a follow up from the engagement of religious congregations and faith communities in the November conference on climate change in Egypt (COP27) and the December conference on biological diversity in Montreal (COP15). It was moderated by Centre Oblate executive director, Joe Gunn, and included a prayerful reflection by Sister Joan Atkinson, CSJ, an introduction to the discussion by Sister Sue Wilson, CSJ, and presentations by two speakers: Tzephora Berman from the [Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative](#), and Louise Romain from [Stop Ecocide](#). The speakers shared about their initiatives and actions that participants can take to support them.

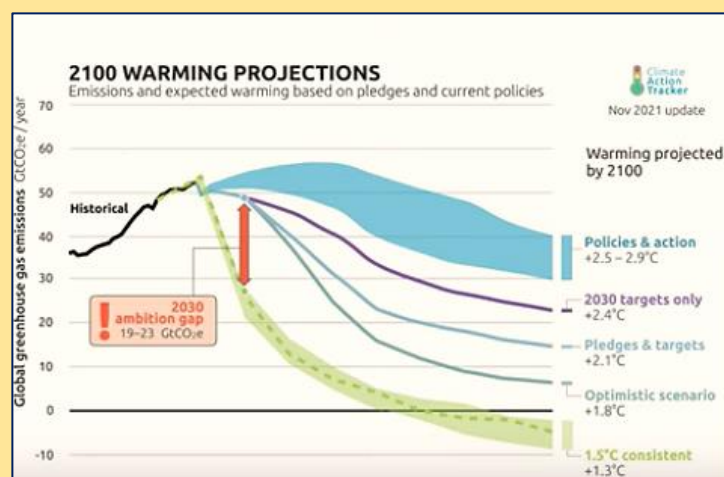


[The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative](#) calls for an end to fossil fuel production and a just transition to a green economy that will support workers and communities.



[Stop Ecocide](#) calls for a recognition in international law of the crime of ecocide, destroying ecosystems and species.

Both speakers shared on the support they have received from faith communities, including an endorsement of the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty by Cardinal Czerny, head of the Vatican Dicastery for Integral Human Development.



[CLICK HERE](#)  
to see the recording of this webinar!





## MARTHA NEW GROWERS UPDATE

Yet another season of Martha New Growers Program begins! On March 20<sup>th</sup>, Sisters of St. Martha re-signed last year's four New Growers: Meghan Johnny, David Matheson, Danielle Speck, and Clayton MacLeod to allow them to continue their growth as small-scale organic market gardeners.

Before the official signing, the four Growers, their mentor David Greenberg, Sr. Florence Kennedy and Darlene O'Leary took the time to look at the infrastructure (the barn and the greenhouse) and discussed possible improvements for this season as well as future needs to enhance the site and ensure the ongoing success of the program.

Martha New Growers Program, which this year celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, is intended to teach young people all the basic steps of organic gardening: crop planning, soil preparation, planting and maintaining crops, storage, and finally, marketing and selling – all through hands-on experience. Since 2013, seventeen young people participated in the program, gaining experience and confidence in running a small-scale farm business.



New Growers 2023 signing. L to R: Sr. Florence Kennedy, Darlene O'Leary, Sr. Joanne O'Regan, Meghan Johnny, David Matheson, Clayton MacLeod, and Danielle Speck. Seated: David Greenberg and Sr. Brendalee Boisvert.

[Click here](#)  
to learn more  
about Martha  
New Growers  
Program!





## DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE SOLIDARITY VISITOR

Martha Justice Ministry co-hosted an event on March 21<sup>st</sup> to welcome this year's Development and Peace Solidarity Visitor to Antigonish.

Ramy Chan is the executive director of the Youth Resource Development Program in Cambodia, a D&P partner organization. She spoke to the group gathered about the work of her organization empowering youth, teaching critical thinking, and encouraging civic engagement. Atlantic region D&P animator, Adah Ogbe, introduced this year's Share Lent campaign, [Stand for the Land](#), which highlights the importance of protecting the land and land defenders.

Ramy and Adah were in Antigonish as part of their Atlantic-wide visits. They were grateful to the Marthas for hosting them at Parkland overnight, and the local D&P Diocesan Council is very appreciative of the congregation's support for this visit.



Ramy Chan and Darlene O'Leary

[Click here](#) to learn more about Ramy and other Solidarity Visitors!

## NEW BLOG!

Learn more about Martha Justice Ministry projects in Darlene's new blog!

Darlene O'Leary, Martha Justice Ministry Coordinator, often works on collaborative campaigns with various like-minded organizations advocating for social and ecological justice issues. She represents the congregation at national or international conferences such as COP-15 and participates in public events related to social and ecological justice. In her role as SC Federation UN Liaison, she regularly attends UN meetings.



We invite anyone who is interested in staying informed and updated during events and campaigns that are important to the Congregation to read [this blog](#)! Darlene will keep you in the loop!





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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.