

*In this column, we bring individual experiences of current and past ministries of the Marthas as they live by the mission of the congregation “to embrace and respond to the cry for Gospel Hospitality.”*

Sister Anne Coady, 91, joined the Marthas at the age of 18. She devoted her Religious Life to teaching, and doing social work at different institutional settings. A welcoming presence to everyone, she has always loved people.

When asked why she chose Religious Life, Sister Anne recalls a life changing experience during high school years:

*“I think the seed was sown by my parents [devote Catholics] and then by a talk given by a priest at my high school – on the need of prayer especially at night, when many people are tempted to crime of all kinds – burglary, prostitution, drug and alcohol addictions. In response to this I got up and prayed – [my sister] Marge joined me often, usually for an hour. Then I began reading up on the various orders in Canada and USA. One day, as I was doing just that, Bas [my brother] came for a visit and asked, “What’s up?” So, I told him, “Well, I’m thinking of entering a religious order and writing to get some information [...] Bas suggested I take a look at the Sisters of St. Martha who staff and operate the hospital where he had spent the last couple of years”. Bas described the Marthas as “real people, very hospitable, who went out of their way to do whatever they could for others”.*

She visited the Antigonish convent and felt very welcome by the Marthas whose friendliness and simplicity impressed her. By the end of that weekend visit, she knew that’s where she wanted to be. She knew she had found a perfect community, one that *“allowed people to*



Sister Anne Coady

*follow their hearts”.* Her life in the Postulate and Novitiate consisted in working in various departments of the Motherhouse, of learning ways to meditate, pray and to see life as dedicated to God in service to each other and those people they would serve on their missions when professed.

Sr. Anne started as a choir/music teacher, then taught elementary school grades mostly around Nova Scotia. She obtained a teaching diploma from the Normal College in Truro and a BA from St. Francis Xavier University. Wonderful memories from her teaching years abound and she emphasizes the universal lesson learned

as a teacher: *“keep calm, talk softly, especially to children”*. Later in life, she also taught a year’s social work course at the university level in Lethbridge, AB.

While teaching, Sr. Anne saw a lot of poverty and social issues, so she asked to go into social work. The Marthas were very supportive. She was missioned to work at Family Services of Eastern Nova Scotia in Whitney Pier where she learned all about the practice of social work from Sr. Eugenie Delaney, an experienced social worker. *“Sr. Eugenie’s love and respect for people were inspirational”*. She knew how to see a need and meet it, offering people *“encouragement, support and somehow always managing to help lighten their spirits”*. Having worked with such a great role model, Sr. Anne went on to study and graduated from Carleton University with a master’s degree in social work.



Sister Anne Coady, 1960s

Her first placement was at Montreal General Hospital. Over 25 years of her social work career happened in various hospitals run by the Marthas in Canada and in Lowell, Mass. in the USA. She also worked for many years in Family Services in Nova Scotia, but it’s the hospital work that Sr. Anne cherished the most - helping people who often were at their lowest, getting them ready to carry on with their lives outside the hospital, making sure that they could access all the services they needed to succeed.

Both work settings came with their own risks and Sr. Anne talks about them openly. During her career, Sr. Anne had to learn she couldn’t help everybody, even though her heart longed for fixing what was wrong. She recalls a colleague saying after a work visit with one family: *“Anne, you have to remember, they’re not your family”* and she just responded *“but they are...”* That’s how deeply she felt for that family and for anybody and everybody...

A big source of strength for Sr. Anne has always been her community. She couldn’t have done the work without it, and she has been enjoying the communal life at different stages of her life very much. Having lived together with so many Sisters, she assures there wasn’t any Martha she truly disliked. Although they all have different backgrounds, Sr. Anne believes they melded together, glued by their focus on people and hospitality, and, of course, by their prayer. She highlights that, personally, she couldn’t have gone through her life without a deep faith in God and the power of prayer. She prays, above all, like her mother used to do when Sr. Anne was young, for everyone who struggles.

*“I think friendliness and caring about people is godliness. You don’t have to be talking about God all the time, you just know that he is with you all the time.”*

Marthas are all about Gospel Hospitality. It is what attracted Sr. Anne to the Congregation during her first visit. She admired how the Sisters were putting people first, always welcoming anyone in any circumstance. It has always been about people, and she has tried to be kind and open to all throughout her career.

After she retired from social work, she did parish ministry in a small community, and later she was a welcoming presence at the Bethany Retreat Centre and, finally, Bethany Library. Sr. Anne lives now at Mary’s Court, the Enhanced Care area in Parkland Antigonish where she cares deeply about the staff who care for her and other Marthas. While her outside working ministry years are over, Sr. Anne continues to live Gospel Hospitality everyday in Mary’s Court, cherishing those around her.

One gets enthralled with the countless anecdotes, memories of people, stories, a lifetime of relationships and connections with people she knew through work and within the community. This short article cannot even begin to encompass the wealth of her life experience as a Martha.

