

Sister Marie Thérèse Richard was 22 years old when she started to work as a pastry cook at Bethany. Professed in 1953, she dedicated her active years to home making ministry. Now retired, she continues to provide Gospel Hospitality to the people that surround her.

Sisters of St. Martha were initially established to provide household management such as food preparation, housekeeping, laundry and sewing services to St. Francis Xavier College (StFX). They kept the college neat and comfortable with a home-like appearance and warm atmosphere.

Not long after forging a new congregation (1900), Marthas were called to other ministries in Antigonish, NS, and beyond. They evolved into professionals in healthcare, education, social work, etc. But household management remained an important ministry of many skilled sisters who dedicated their lives to home making, showing through their hard work a lifelong commitment to Gospel Hospitality. (Cameron, p.11)

The value and status of the domestic arts and household services may be doubted by some, but the truth is that Sisters' work was essential. "Even though people do not live by bread alone, neither can they survive without the fundamentals of food, shelter, and clothing. Moreover, this 'first work of the congregation' brought the Marthas into close contact with people and made them countless friends; their thoughtful, kindly and humble service, modeled after that of their biblical patroness, St. Martha, inspired gratitude and love for them. Martha homemakers were frequently creative, capable Sisters and widely involved in parish activities." (Cameron, p. 294).



*Sr. Marie Thérèse Richard, 2020*

Sister Marie Thérèse Richard entered religious life at 19. During almost 60 years of service, she was a cook, homemaker, dietary and food service supervisor, and a group leader in various Martha missions in Eastern and Western Canada. She worked in hospitals, seminaries, homes for unwed mothers, and community houses. Despite her busy ministry, she was always free to go out after her tasks were done and help people around her. Being very observant, she just knew who needed support and what was the best way of offering it:

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*"I remember one woman... her husband had died, and she was left with 3 young children... I was good at cutting hair, so I was able to help with that...I was very fond of them".*

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Paying a visit, lending a listening ear, saying words of encouragement, or offering practical help – bigger or smaller gestures – were always appreciated by people in need. She loved working at St. Rita's Hospital in Sydney, NS, where she was much more than a cook. She related to patients, visited with them, often seeing these friendly Cape Bretoners outside of the hospital, in the community. She was always eager to chat and learn about their lives. She feels that she was needed the most while working at St. Peter's Hospital in Melville, SK:

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*"There were some groups in town that were poor, and we'd go there. Even if you just listened to people, it made them feel good. Sometimes you'd say 'it's not like that, try this or that'..."*

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It is this aspect of being a homemaker – the connection with people – that Sister Marie Thérèse is most grateful for. It gave her opportunity to be kind and helpful to others, an approach to life she had learnt at home.

She considers herself lucky to have always felt that her childhood home was full of good spirit and good people. Born into a family of 12 in Charlos Cove, Guysborough County, NS, she remembers her mother as a very warm woman, glad to help around. Her father, a very smart fisherman who read all the time, was very knowledgeable and used to offer educated and respectful advice on many different topics to people in his community. Her house was always full of people.

Since she was little, Sister Marie Thérèse has always cherished prayer time and she knew she would be a religious sister

at 9 years old but waited until she was older to communicate it to her parents. Her sister Anita entered the Marthas one year later. Although sad to see them leave, their parents were very happy they both had found a vocation.

Sister Marie Thérèse entered the Marthas not knowing what ministry she would do and welcomed being a cook. She used to bake bread and, as the picture on the next page shows, lots and lots of it was made, both white and brown, and she loved the activity. Being healthy and strong helped her handle the physical stress of being on her feet all day long.



*Sr. Marie Thérèse Richard at 19*

Her work as a homemaker never seemed tedious or boring. She enjoyed making nice things and keeping the homes in order. She is remembering now many beautiful houses such as Martha Retreat Centre in Lethbridge, AB or the Cardinal's Residence in Willowdale, ON that were a pleasure to take care of.



Her common sense and good judgement were quickly noticed, and she was often put in charge of training lay staff in hospitals to do the household work properly. The teaching aspect of her ministry was very fulfilling. As a dietary supervisor, Sister Marie Thérèse taught boys in the St. Pius X High School in Ottawa how to cook, wait tables, etc. Often, the youth were grateful for the opportunity to learn a profession and to develop a skill. Perhaps in less obvious ways than sisters in social work, nursing or teaching, she has worked for the development of persons all her life.

Most importantly, her ministry life has been about hospitality in a literal sense but also about Gospel Hospitality – having an open heart to others:

*“I am always surprised how people come to me and want me to help them with personal things, questions. I am a good listener. And you feel for people if you were brought up that way”.*

At age 93, Sister Marie Thérèse feels very lucky to still enjoy good health and clear memory. Grateful for her own sense of humor and the ability to settle well, she took the move from the Motherhouse to Parkland Antigonish quite well. She enjoys, much like in her earlier years, being in an environment where she can meet various people, form relationships, hear their stories, learn of their problems, or simply observe. She is curious and interested in whatever is going on with the people around her, in her community, and beyond.

These days, well over a decade after retiring from homemaking work, Sister Marie Thérèse is doing ministry of prayer. She is able to touch into whatever difficulty and suffering exists in the world. She feels for people in need and welcomes them into her heart with prayer, an example of Gospel Hospitality at its core:

*“I pray for everybody because there is a lot of people that don’t have others to pray for them and are fearful or sick”.*

She is grateful for everything, content with her full, long life of work and hospitality service. She still gives a lot but is now also able to receive help herself, graciously and appreciatively.

The contributions of Martha home makers were “an integral part of the congregation’s work and identity”, reinforcing “Marthas’ beloved traits of simplicity, hospitality, warmth and service”. (Cameron, p. 294)

Source: *And Martha Served*, James D. Cameron, 2000.



*Sr. Marie Thérèse Richard baking bread in Bethany kitchen 1963-66*