

SYCAMORE 2007



Greetings from the Director

As we journey through life we are always facing the unknown as well as our insecurities. As we struggle to make good decisions we must leave behind what is so familiar to embrace something new. As I come to the end of my first year as Director of Martha Associates I believe my 'YES' to this new ministry has given me enthusiasm and a new purpose.

My travels have led me to meet faith-filled men and women who are sincere about their Christian lives. The year was a time of learning, of embracing what is at the heart of the community of the Sisters of St. Martha and our Martha Associates. In my reading and listening to the stories I caught glimpses of the tremendous love God has for us and the loving connections we have for each other.

Some highlights for me were:

- + Visiting and meeting the communities of Martha Associates.
- + Receiving our newest Associates, Debbie Bennett, Linda Longmire and Sarah Francis.
- + The General Assembly of our Congregation where 99% of Marthas were home at Bethany. This event was a graced opportunity to share about our Associate Program. We were blessed to have input from associates, a coordinator and a Martha sister who belongs to a community that hosts associates. It was a sacred moment. A very positive thrust and an openness to wherever God is calling us into our future.
- + Conference in Halifax where for the first time the Religious Congregations in the Atlantic Provinces and their Associates gathered.
- + The challenge of updating our website which expanded my mind.

As we begin a new year it will indeed have it's blessings and challenges. I ask you to begin to pray and discern someone among us who

will be a co-director.

Blessings and thank you for welcoming me into your lives.

**Sister
Sandra
Director
Martha**



**White
of**

Associates

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ARCAN Conference in Halifax

The ARCAN conference in Halifax was the first time ever that Associates and Sisters from ten Congregations of Women Religious gathered together. The theme was **SOUL LISTENING**. Our spiritual guide gave us the opportunity to listen to one's inner voice and feel God's divine breath. The weekend was a gift. It provided an opportunity to meet others who share a faith connection.

The resource speaker for the weekend was Macrina Wiederkehr, a Benedictine sister, who is a well known author of many books including; *Seasons of the Heart*, *The Song of the Seed*, *Gold in our Memories*, and *The Circle of Life* to mention a few.

Thoughts to Ponder:



The planning committee for the ARCAN weekend with guest speaker Marcina Wiederkehr (Pictured front row between Sisters Claudette Gallant and Sandra White).

Shirley Van Ryswyk and Sister Sandra White were the MC's for the ARCAN weekend!

- † We simply wait and listen to God breathing in us.
- † We stand before moments of pain, confusion, impatience, joy, sorrow, delight, doubt, fear, uncertainty. We keep vigil with our lives.
- † Stop in the middle of your morning's work for a sacred pause.
- † You are a temple of God. This is your real work place. Dwell there in silence that you may absorb the gifts waiting for you in the darkness of your unknowing.
- † Answer the question... Why do I hate to wait?
- † You are a temple not a courthouse.
- † Have I been a good memory in someone's life today.
- † At the end of the day what treasures have we harvested?
- † We cannot leave a religious experience and be the same.
- † Don't run from loneliness always live with the eternal questions.

Group photo of all of the Sisters of St. Martha and Martha Associates that attended the ARCAN Conference in Halifax.



General Assembly - April 2007

The General Assembly was a gathering of all Marthas at Bethany. It provided an opportunity to dialogue about our Martha Associate Program and gain a greater appreciation of this Ministry to the laity. There was a great openness to developing new expressions of Martha Associates.

We were blessed to have Associates from both east and west share their stories, helping make real what can and has happened when we come together to share our faith, when we welcome and extend hospitality, and when we are open to mutual giving and receiving.



The Martha Associates were well represented at the General Assembly by:

Sister Claudette Gallant,
Sister Edna MacDonald,
Terry Campbell,
Patti Boudreau,
Sister Madgalene Lichacz,
Sister Sandra White
and
Yvonne Donahue (below).

A special thank you to, **Yvonne Donahue**, an associate of Emmaus Community in Calgary who shared her story through the use of technology. Although Yvonne was not at the Assembly in person her sharing was greatly appreciated by all.



The following is the sharing by **Patti Boudreau** at the General Assembly

What it means to be a Martha Associate

Good Afternoon:

Thank you for inviting me today to your assembly to speak to you about what it means to be a Martha Associate. I thought when Sister Sandra asked me to do this that it would be a simple task, but I soon realized that it was not going to be so simple. I had so much to tell you and only a little bit of time to do it. How would I ever fit it all into a five minute speech? So after much thought and many drafts here is

what I most wanted to share with you today.

As I began to write my thoughts drifted back to when I first learned about the Martha's. It was 28 years ago here at Bethany that my husband Jim introduced me to Sister Mary of Good Council. She was the first Martha that I ever met and let me tell you she left an impression. That day I learned Bethany was a very special place filled with remarkable women. So to say the least Jim and I were both honored when

General Assembly - April 2007 continued...

asked to join the Associate group.

For me the Associate group has been a real blessing. It has helped me to deepen my personal relationship with God. The Associate group had allowed me to grow as a person of faith. The Associate group taught me new and interesting facts and ideas. The associate meetings have given me a place and time in my busy world to slow down, explore my inner thoughts and feelings and the opportunity to meet new people and make dear friends that share a spiritual connection.

There are so many positive and wonderful things that I could say about being an Associate that I am sure I could talk all afternoon but today the most important thing that I want you to know is that what means to me the most about being an Associate goes hand in hand to what you the Sisters of St. Martha mean to me. To put it simply ... I love being an Associate

because I love this congregation of women and what you are all about.

I'm in awe of your commitment and love of God and to 'serve' others in his name. So to be a Martha Associate and to carry even just a little bit of your charism into my daily life gives me hope, strength and inspiration and why I am most grateful to be an Associate member.

Thank you

Patti Boudreau
Bethany Community

After the presentation by the sisters and associates, there was some table dialogue which produced these thoughts:

- † Spiritual growth is evident and it is evident that the Spirit is at work among us. It is an expression of our ministry of spirituality.
- † There is a ripple affect of this ministry into family life as well as parish life.

Antigonish - Bethany

We are sixteen Associates - 10 lay and 6 sisters - at our first meeting in October of 2006, we used the book "Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time" by Marcus J. Borg for the faith development part of the meeting. The group was challenged by this scripture scholar and wanted to read more. Chosen sections of the book continued to be used at each monthly gathering. Borg's material was good news to some, challenging for many and even annoying to others, as he moved the reader beyond the literal interpretation to ponder the scriptures meaning and message. We did not cover the whole book but were given a taste for the scriptures here presented in light of the latest biblical research and understanding and, therefore, the title!

For the last meeting, we used Albert Nolan's book, "Jesus Today" reflecting on the chapter 'Radically Free'. This reading provoked a very lively discussion, as well as being personally

insightful for many and even life transforming for some!

In preparation for the Congregations Regional Gathering in Antigonish in April, the group was given the introduction of Sr. Elaine Prevallet's booklet "In The Service of Life" for personal home reading. Sr. Elaine was a speaker at the Regional.

Our year end closing, in May, is held at our Seabright house by the water. This is a time to celebrate and give thanks and renew our commitment as Martha Associates.

Sister Josephine Keyzer
Coordinator

Eskasoni - Teachers' Residence

GREETINGS FROM THE ESKASONI ASSOCIATES

Pauline Morris our contact person has decided to take this year off. Two of her daughters have returned to University for further studies and Pauline is busy taking care of her granddaughters. We will miss Pauline, she is always available and ready to help. Rhodena

Steven graciously accepted to be our contact person while Pauline is off. Since Rhodena is working full time we will review how this is working out for Rhodena in the near future.

Martha Associates of Kamloops

We applaud our Martha Associates from Kamloops, who continue to meet, share their faith, embrace and keep alive the true hospitality and spirit of the Sisters of St. Martha.



SISTERS OF ST. MARTHA OF ANTIGONISH. Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish's former teachers and parish workers have returned to Nova Scotia but the link to Kamloops remains strong. Sr. Sandra White, the congregation's Director of Martha Associates, is seated at right in this photo taken during her most recent visit to the Kamloops group. Pictured (L-R) are: STANDING Rose Nowicki, Josie Van Elslander, Jo Topolewski and Albert Van Elslander; SEATED Betty O'Fee, Martin Merkosky, Doris Merkosky and Sr. Sandra White, CSM – PHOTO BY RANDY NOWICKI

Diocesan News, Roman Catholic Diocese of Kamloops – East

The Sycamore will be published once a year. Please remember your cameras when your Associate group is enjoying a gathering. Your photos will help bring life to each publication of The Sycamore. So, click away!

Sydney - Martha Community

Greetings from the Martha Community on Whitney Avenue in Sydney.

Our group is comprised of Joe and Lillian MacKenzie, Theresa Gillis, Terry and Ann Campbell, Bev Mullins, Mary Gillis, Marguerite MacNeil, Mary MacKinnon, Anne Coones, Mae Rowe, Donna Luedey, Imelda Terry, and Darlene Stephenson. Several people are beginning the journey to discern if they will join the group. They are Shelly MacDougall, Cathy MacAdam, and Anne Marie MacInnis.

We are accompanied on our journey by Sisters Loretta Gillis, Dorothy Moore and Therese LeBlanc. This year we are grieving the loss of a lively interesting member of our group who died in 2006. Rannie Gillis, husband of Theresa, was a long-time member of the associates and will be missed by all.

We gathered after the summer in October and began planning what we would like to do this year. Those who attended the Associate weekend at Bethany in September gave an account of this lively weekend.

In November, Sister Jovita MacPherson visited the Associates and introduces us to the concept of "Vocation Culture" which is a mandate emanating from the last General Chapter of the Sisters of St. Martha. It states that "every person has a particular vocation, a call to live their Christian life as a married person, a committed single life, a priest or religious." The presentation was very thought provoking and discussion surrounded how we can involve young people in discerning what their vocation is.

In December we gathered for a potluck supper and donated a gift to Transition House. After an enjoyable meal, we made our way to the ATV studio to tape Christmas Day Mass for Mass for Shut Ins. Everyone dressed in their Christmas best and we started the Christmas season off, complete with a snowstorm.

In January, we watched a video called "To Touch a Grieving Heart" and discussed instances where we grieved ourselves or were able to help a grieving person. Some people shared very moving stories and all felt the video would be helpful the next time they were faced with what to do for someone suffering a loss.

For our gathering in February, we reflected on the presence of Jesus in the ordinariness of our lives and watched a video called "Finding God in All Things." It helped us to focus on seeing God in each other and trying to live each day as God-centered people.

Sister Sandra White, the new coordinator of the Martha Associates groups visited with us in March and said the energy and enthusiasm she finds in each group has been inspiring to her. She recently visited the associate group in the West and we all enjoyed the stories of her travels.

In May, Fr. Gerald Campbell will be presenting a talk on "Jesus in the Gospels of Luke" followed by a question period. Our group is growing and with each new person, we are blessed to hear another new idea or another experience from which we can all grow. We look forward to each month and the prayer, conversation and sharing it brings.

Darlene Stephenson.



Pictured here are two of our newest Martha Associates: Linda Longmire and Sarah Francis are connected to the Sisters of St. Martha in Trenton

Sydney Mines - St. Clare Convent

This has been a difficult year for our group, with the unexpected death of two of our Associates.

Muriel Laffin died of a massive brain hemorrhage following the recent death of her husband after a long illness and sudden death of her daughter who had terminal cancer.

Helen Taylor diagnosed with a recurrence of melanoma had hoped to live long enough to see her first grandchild. This was not to be. Helen died days before the birth of her grandson - Ben.

Three other members were diagnosed with serious health issues.

Mauve Benoit had to undergo chemotherapy and radiation treatments for lung cancer. To date she has been given a clean bill of health. Theresa Reashore was diagnosed with severe heart problems but is under the care of excellent cardiologist.

Gerald Edwards major surgery was followed by complications. Gerald's daily walking routine and overall good health contributed to his recovery.

Although this has been a difficult year, it has also been a blessing. Each of us responded by sharing any way we could. In many ways we are more aware of our bondedness; that we are never alone. It has deepened our sense of responsibility to give of self to each other when it is needed.

Sister Michelle MacDougall

Trenton - Christ the King Convent

News from Trenton: Becoming Associated with the Welcoming Martha's.

Along the path of my spiritual journey, I've had the privilege of becoming acquainted with many wonderful spiritual women from different religious communities. All of them have given the whole of their lives to nurturing a sense of the sacred, love for God, and the creating of social justice expressed in the unique ways of their own unique selves. Each one has enriched my life and I am deeply grateful to having been mentored and befriended within their sacred circles of God's love.

So why do I feel called to be a Martha associate? I met the Martha's almost twenty years ago through retreats at Bethany Center and since then have become acquainted with several of the Sisters of St. Martha. I was drawn to the Martha's warm down to earthness, intentional simplicity, integrated spirituality, wonderful sense of fun, and the charism of hospitality and welcome. I was fortunate to experience these beautiful gifts of the Marthas through friendships such as with Sister Dorothy Moore. From Sister Dorothy I learned a deeper sense of respect and appreciation for God, others, creation and myself; for this I will be forever grateful. Sister Dorothy's sincere commitment to starting her day with prayer and interior silence has fostered my own ongoing commitment to such daily spiritual practices.

Over the years I have grown to know other Marthas in a personal way which confirmed for me that the Marthas bring real, practical and down to earth life to the profound and sacred values that I too hold dear and for which I sought

support that I may practice these gospel values in my everyday life. I began to feel a call to be associated with the Sister's of St. Martha recognizing the honour and privilege to do so should I be an acceptable candidate.

The closest associate community to where I live in Halifax is Trenton, so off I went for my monthly hour and a half drive down, and hour and a half drive back allowing me time for reflection on what had been prayed about and shared at the associates meetings and to reflect on where God was leading me and indeed welcoming me. Sister Edna MacDonald who leads our group and Sisters Mary and Marie are warm and welcoming spiritual women who have supported and mentored me along my path of discernment. The other associates of the Trenton group I have grown to respect and love as well as they too have welcomed and supported me through their prayers and presence. I am drawn to the contemplative, humble, and deep spiritual nature of our Trenton associates group and I cannot express enough gratitude for the real joy and spiritual freedom I experience in their company and in the company of Martha communities in general.

The word Associate is pivotal, for to be associated with the spiritual community of the Sister's of St. Martha is to be associated with the gospel values they live which are rooted in prayer and compassion and expressed in welcome and support. Through this association, we lay women and men may in turn reach out to those along our life's journey to be a warm and welcoming

Trenton - Christ the King Convent

presence as St. Martha was to our Lord Jesus. To become a Martha associate is to belong, in a supportive way ourselves, to a community of vowed spiritual women where I see the charism of hospitality and welcome as one of the most profound and sacred ways of being. I deeply value the profound spiritual gift that true welcome is-openness of mind, heart and home.

It was the painful experience of having lived twenty years with one who was inhospitable and unwelcoming, who saw visitors including my friends and family, as imposing on his space, and the suffering I experienced within such a closed and controlled environment that gravitated me so strongly to a spiritual community where welcome is the essence, energy, and foundation of its spirituality. Hence, I do not take welcome for granted; it is something I treasure, both being welcomed and being free to welcome.

To be truly welcoming is an experience of something deeper, of a sacred openness born of compassion and non judgment and a willingness to relinquish one's self interest. To be truly welcoming is to be *not* preoccupied but willing to create space interiorly and exteriorly, to welcome not only the physical presence of another, but their ideas and the possibilities of God in our diversity. To belong as a Martha Associate is to be supported and to give support for our spiritual practices that we may grow in our capacity to welcome the Sacred Presence of God within us and around us and to grow in an awareness of God's welcoming that holds each of us as sacred.

'Sacred' according to the Oxford dictionary is to "safeguard with reverence." I feel called by God to safeguard with reverence our spiritual communities, to give my time, energy, love and reverence to preserve this most Sacred resource that our often unaware world is in tender need of. I thank God that the Sisters of St. Martha have crossed my path, touched my life, held my soul and nurtured my sense of the sacred.

It is pure honour and joy to know that I will become an associate of the Sisters of St. Martha. I pray that I may be a source of life, joy and affirmation to each of the Marthas and to my sister and brother associates.

Linda Longmire

Sisters of St. Martha have a *NEW* Website!!



The Marthas new website is at the same location, **www.themarthas.com** but has been completely re-designed. The Martha Associates section (under "Affiliations" from the main page) is still being built, we are hoping to see it grow over the next few months. A special thanks to **Darlene Stephenson** for accepting to be a contact person (on the website) for people who may have questions about our Martha Associate Program.

*Questions or comments on the
Sycamore? Please contact:*

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Thanks to Sister Claire MacNeil for her contribution as coordinator of the Martha Associates in Martha Center, Lethbridge.

Welcome to Sister Isabel MacEachern, our new coordinator of the Associate Group at Martha Center.