

MARTHA ASSOCIATES *Sycamore* 2021

A Message from the Martha Associate Director

“Life is often a desert, it is difficult to walk, but if we trust in God, it can become beautiful and wide as a highway.

Never lose hope; continue to believe, always, in spite of everything. Hope opens new horizons; making us capable of dreaming what is not even imaginable”

Pope Francis



This quote from Pope Francis’s book “On Hope” gives us much to reflect upon. I was thinking about his words as I looked back over these past 16 months. Our world has been “through the wringer” as my Grandmother used to say! I took some time to re-read our SYCAMORE 2020. I wondered what had really changed over this period of time, if anything! What was different?

My initial thoughts were gloomy..... we are still in a Pandemic and it appears that Covid 19 and all its variants will be with us for an

indeterminate amount of time. Doctor Robert Strang, chief public health officer in Nova Scotia, tells us that we must learn to live in a Covid world. We must all continue to educate ourselves on how to live with this virus and be safe. Yet, this is only one part of our story. Throughout these long and difficult months we have continued to witness loss of life due to the virus, horrific acts of violence in our communities and in our world, acts of hatred against those with different skin colors, different religious beliefs, prejudice and intolerance for those who live on the margins, civil and world unrest, and here, in this beautiful place we call home, Canada, the horror, reality and truth we must face as a country and as a Church, with regard to the discoveries of many unmarked graves found at

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A Note From *(continued)*

the Residential Schools in the West, and the treatment of our Indigenous peoples. There are times I am sure that we have not learned anything from the mistakes of our past because we keep repeating the same mistakes!! Why is that?

As always, it is important to name and be aware of the reality we are in, the painful truths of our time. Our eyes and ears must be open, our minds must be open, but most of all, our hearts must be open. Reflecting on the words of Pope Francis: "Never lose Hope" and from the Martha Direction Statement: "In the face of our reality, we dare to stand in undaunted hope", I am reminded that hoping and trusting in our God will lead us through all that we must endure and along every road we must travel. God's love in the spirit of Jesus will guide our way!

Referring to my "gloomy" thoughts, I pondered them again in the light of "God with us in all things" and in the light of hope. Even though we are still in a pandemic, I am grateful for the brilliant scientific minds that God has crafted for so many wonderful purposes, including the development of vaccines in so short a time to combat Covid 19. I am grateful that the sharing of these vaccines around the world will eventually control the spread of this virus. I am grateful to recognize God's presence in all those who have spoken out against hatred, abuse, violence and racism in all its forms and for those who stand in solidarity and hope alongside all people who suffer the consequences of these evils. I feel deep pain and sorrow

over the contribution our Roman Catholic Church has had in the suffering of our Indigenous Brothers and Sisters, yet grateful for the difficult truths that must be freed in order for reconciliation and hope to thrive. I have hope that we can make a better world, one act of love at a time!

I am reminded of the words of the Prophet Isaiah:

"Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength,

They will soar on wings like eagles,

They will run and not grow weary,

They will walk and not be faint."

(Isaiah 40:31)

Sometimes it is hard to feel that sense of hope. Hope requires a deep trust and confidence in our God. When we dare to allow ourselves to place all our trust in God, our Creator; in Jesus, our beloved friend and Lord; in the power of the Holy Spirit, hope cannot and will not fail us. Hope will lift us up; it will carry us forward.

With hope in my heart,

Julia Townsend

July, 2021

With Love and Prayers



We were saddened when we learned about the children's unmarked graves found at residential schools in the West.

The Martha Associates grieve with our Indigenous peoples. Most especially, we are keeping our Eskasoni Associates close to our hearts in prayer.

We, as Associates, need to commit to learning from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the 94 Calls to Action.

ARCAN



ARCAN (Atlantic Religious Congregations and Associate Network) has had quite the “virtual” year! Since the pandemic, our meetings have all been via ZOOM. The advantage of ZOOM is that many more ARCAN committee members were able to attend our meetings. The disadvantage was the loss of person to person contact where we could sit together and chat over a good cup of hot tea!

Nevertheless, our meeting time was productive. The committee has met on October 2-3, 2020 and April 16-17, 2021. During our meetings, we have built in time for learning, prayer and reflection. During the October meeting, we were blessed to have a presentation from Sr. Elizabeth Davis, Congregation Leader for Sisters of Mercy in Newfoundland, who highlighted some elements of transformation in our world and in our Church today. In April, our guest was Fr. Gerald Wescott, Rector, Anglican Church of the Resurrection in South River, Newfoundland. Fr. Gerald lead us in a reflection on “Deeper Listening”. In the near future, the ARCAN Committee is hoping to open the prayer and reflection sessions to the larger ARCAN membership.



The ARCAN Steering Committee is proud of their efforts to begin an **ARCAN newsletter**. This newsletter is an online newsletter which is sent to each ARCAN member’s email, as well as to the members of our respective Congregations. It is fast becoming a wonderful communication tool. There have been four ARCAN Newsletter produced to date. The Newsletter is called “**The Leading Edge**”. Copies of the newsletters are found on the Martha web site under the associate section. **Check www.themarthas.com and click “Join us”** as a Martha Associate to find the newsletters and other interesting reading!!!

NACAR



This year we have learned that after 25 years of faithful stewardship, **NACAR** will begin the process of dissolution, effective June 30, 2022. For the present, the **NACAR web site** can still be accessed. It is not yet clear as to whether the web site will be transferred to another location or will also be dissolved. (nacar.org)

At the end of her letter to the **NACAR** membership, Jeanne Connolly, President of the **NACAR** Board of Directors stated:

“We are confident that the Spirit of God is in this hard decision and that something new is waiting to be born. Believing that the Associate way of life is a transformational presence in the church and world, let us join together in prayer and thanksgiving for 25 years of committed service and openness for what is yet to be.”

“The future belongs to those who give the next generation reason for hope.”

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Martha Justice Ministry Coordinator

This June has marked my first year as Coordinator of Martha Justice Ministry with the Sisters of St. Martha, Antigonish. It has been a year full of meeting wonderful people, learning and growing in our social justice and ecology work, and engaging in advocacy on issues of importance locally, nationally, and internationally.

Prior to arriving in Antigonish, my husband and I moved between PEI (Epekwitk), where I grew up, and Ottawa. I did my PhD in Theology and Ethics at Saint Paul University in Ottawa. While finishing my doctorate, I was blessed to work as executive director of Galilee Centre, an Oblate retreat centre in Arnprior, ON.

I did post-doctoral work at UPEI and then returned to Ottawa, where I worked at Citizens for Public Justice as a socio-economic policy analyst. The focus of my work there was poverty eradication in Canada, and I had the wonderful experience of working on the Dignity for All campaign, which pushed for a poverty eradication plan for Canada.

My experience, ranging from academic research and teaching, retreat centre program development, and policy



analysis and advocacy, has led me to Martha Justice Ministry, which brings all those pieces together! The richness of the Marthas' charism of Gospel hospitality provides the theological and spiritual foundation from which the work of this ministry flows.

This year, with the guidance of our Core Group, we have been able to build on the work already started, through groups, networks, and campaigns focussed on poverty eradication, Indigenous rights and reconciliation, climate justice and creation care, and more. And, of course, we have continued our wonderful New Growers program, mentoring young farmers.

It has been a real blessing to enter into this work, and I truly look forward to our continued spiritual growth, learning, and relationship building.

I am grateful to be able to contribute to the wonderful work of the Marthas through this ministry!

Darlene O'Leary

Martha Justice Ministry Coordinator

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”

(Rom 15: 13)

News From The United Nations NGO

Last year **Covid-19 lockdown** changed many things for all of us as global citizens. Our hearts still go out to all persons who lost loved ones to the pandemic, the suffering of so many people and the grieving which will be with us for a long time. Front line workers are also part of our prayer.

Covid created a great set-back for the implementation of the **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and Agenda 2030. The United Nations report on the SDGs states that with Covid-19, much of the success since 2015 was lost. The gap between persons living in poverty and those living with wealth has grown. Now is the task to creatively restart the implementation so “no one is left behind.”

The 59th UN Commission for Social Development was held virtually February 2021. **The theme was “A socially just transition to sustainable development: The role of digital technology and the well-being of all.”** This covered areas of human rights, governance, education and social protection for all and finances.

The Civil Society Declaration states “Digital technology has shrunk the planet, galvanized voices for social change and transformed the way we live forever. By enabling access to communication and information globally, technology has opened new doors toward advancement around the world. Now more than ever, synergies to pursue and adapt to a sustainable development that leaves no one behind must be explored and put in practice” “We are truly confident in the transformational power of a Digital Technology Revolution based on human rights and dignity, and guided by the values of inclusion, equity, security and transparency”. This last sentence is what guides us in our use of digital technology. We all use technology as we are able and is appropriate.

Let us rejoice about this! Bill C-15: An Act Respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous

Peoples establishes a clear and on-going legal Commitment for the federal government of Canada to ensure that its laws, policies and programs are consistent with the global human rights standards affirmed in 2007 UN Declaration. As of June, 2021, The UN Declaration for Indigenous Persons is now legislation in Canada. It is a framework for dialogue between the Federal Government and the Indigenous Leaders. Gospel Hospitality calls us to welcome this into our own lives and be open to what each of us can do to further this dialogue where we live.

I will be leaving this position of Martha NGO Liaison in June 2022. Darlene O’Leary, Co-ordinator of Martha Justice Ministry, will shadow me for this coming year and be the NGO Liaison in June 2022. It has been a privilege for me to journey with the Martha Associates, on many levels, the last 12 years. Thank you for sharing your life and faith with me. I will carry you and your loved ones in my prayers.

“In the face of our reality, we dare to stand in undaunted hope!”

(Direction Statement Chapter 2019)

Sr. Marion Sheridan- Martha NGO Liaison



“The door to heaven is everywhere begging for love.”

Thomas Merton

Associates as Charism Carriers: Embracing the Call to Leadership



I had the opportunity to spend three days of spirit-rejuvenating learning and reflecting while taking part in the last NACAR-sponsored retreat for Associates and Religious, held May 18 to 20. There were over 200 virtual participants representing numerous Associate groups from all over North America. It was amazing to scroll through the Zoom pages and see the faces of so many Sisters and Associates; all drawn together to share experiences as we find a way forward to live our Gospel call in the face of the reality of our times. There was time to compare notes on how Associates stayed connected through the pandemic; the upside and the downside, and also to voice common hopes, fears and challenges as many Associate groups grapple with the fact that the physical presence of our Religious Sisters is diminishing in our communities.

Our facilitators, Linda Mastro and Amy Kulesa structured the 3 days to incorporate reflection on our individual faith stories, small and large group sharing and prayer. One of the highlights of the retreat was the thought-provoking keynote address provided by Sister Carol Zinn, a Sister of St. Joseph from Philadelphia.

Sister Carol urged retreatants to consider the initial Gospel charism of our Associate groups, and to recall how each of us was attracted to that charism, invited to share in it, and how it has shaped (is shaping) our individual faith journey. How do we keep and share the charism we received through the Sisters who are our conduits to that charism? How have the Sisters lived out that charism? How can we draw on and benefit from the example they have modeled for us as they learned to shift and transform to carry the charism forward through many years of change?

Sr. Carol reminded us that Gospel charism, a free gift of the Holy Spirit, does not change; however, the manner in which a charism is carried forward is constantly unfolding through time, moving at will and always guided by the Holy Spirit. Our task is not to sustain the world we know; but rather to make way for, and participate in the birth of something new that acknowledges and affirms the charism as it is needed in the “now.” We live out that charism in small ways and through larger efforts, in all aspects of our everyday lives, for living the Gospel requires us always to respond to the call to love. Each of us responds as we are; wherever we are in our life’s journey. The Gospels are our daily “how-to” manual as we accept the call.

Throughout the retreat many beautiful prayers and reflections were shared by the facilitators. The prayer entitled **“Patient Trust”** written by Teilhard de Chardin is one I that I particularly appreciate for its reminder to **“trust in the slow work of God.”** At the end of the retreat all of us were left with a lot of food for thought, a feeling of solidarity and much encouragement to “step into the future with undaunted hope.”

I sincerely thank the Sisters of St. Martha and Julia for allowing me the opportunity to be part of these three enriching and spiritually nourishing days of retreat.

Mary Anne Wensveen

Lethbridge, Alberta

Martha Associate Retreat A Silent Prayer retreat

The pandemic with all its physical distancing restrictions paved the way to imagining a different way of holding our annual **Martha Associate Retreat in 2020**. Our retreat became a silent prayer retreat, enjoyed in the comfort of our own homes. While we could not be together physically, we could all be together in a spiritual way, and for the most part, all at the same time!! The prayer retreat was designed so that our Associates and Sisters in the East began at 12:00 pm in the afternoon while our Associates in the West began at the same time, three hours earlier Alberta time, which made it 9:00 am in the morning! There was a unique and wonderful feeling knowing we were praying all together. Everyone received a copy of the Prayer retreat in the snail mail, so no one would be missed. For those who could not join us at the designated time, having a paper copy of the retreat meant they could pray the material at another time. The prayers were also selected so that they could be prayed many times.

There was a great sense of gratitude expressed from both the Sisters and the Associates that we were still able to “gather” together and share in our prayer.



“Although the life of a person is in a land full of thorns and weeds, there is always a space in which the good seed can grow. You have to trust God.”

Pope Francis

"Come with me by yourselves to a quiet

Celebrating St. Martha Association

September

"Come with me by yourselves to a quiet

place and rest awhile” (Mark 6:31)

Sacred Spaces for Prayer Retreat

April 12, 2020

place and rest awhile” (Mark 6:31)





A Moment To Remember

Let us remember our Associates, family members and friends
who have died and are very much present to us.

We hold them in our hearts and remember how they have been
a pocket of hope for us through their beliefs, smiles, attitudes and presence.

Western Associates



From Our Associate prayer-

"In hospitality and companionship with each other, let us be challenged and blessed as we step into the future with undaunted hope."

This past year we experienced our challenges and struggled like so many others to remain optimistic and safe throughout the global pandemic. The quote taken from our Associate Prayer- stepping into the future with **"UNDAUNTED HOPE"**- took on a whole new and deeper meaning. In terms of our gathering for meetings? With the birthing of ZOOM and collaboration between Diana

Sim (Executive Director of the Lethbridge Martha Retreat Center) and our own Associate Director, Julia, our Associate gatherings were able to continue. How interesting it was to discover that despite the distances between us, together yet so far apart, there was a genuine warmth and closeness that permeated throughout those virtual connections. With great joy we were able to see those wonderful Martha Sisters on screen once again and listen as they shared their varied vocation stories. Throughout the months we also managed to feed our souls with a retreat and Mass, lectures and reflections by both Father Andrew and Father Tim Boyle, plus an informative Zoom evening with our Director Julia who teased apart the Martha Direction Statement.

On a sad note, we lost Associate Jim McGinty and at Eastertide, his wife Cathie followed. They had been married for sixty six years. May they both rest peacefully in God's gentle care.

Guided by the Spirit and an abiding faith and trust in our eternal Father, we are looking ahead to the Fall when we are able to meet face to face once again and share the warmth of a hug with our dear Associate friends.

"May we continue, through the radical call of the Gospel to be inspired by the Martha Charism, and the Mission, Vision, and Value Statements." (Associate Prayer)

Submitted by Ina Boyden

Christmas in Lethbridge 2020

On Christmas Eve, 2020, Annella Wehlage, Mary Schmidt, and Sandy Lodge (Martha associates) joined Diana Sim, Executive Director at the Martha Retreat Centre in Lethbridge, along with Elda Barva, Board member at the Retreat Centre, to place the Baby Jesus in the manger. Sandy set up the nativity in the Chapel. Even covid 19 could not stop this beautiful event!!



Sydney / Glace Bay Martha Associate Year End 2020 / 2021



This year for the Martha Associates played out like a boxing match with Covid-19. The Associates won a round, the virus won a round, the Associates won a round, Covid won a round...

The Sydney/Glace Bay group, teaming up this year, came together when possible, and it's possible we won on rounds.

We began in October... after the September prayer retreat. With every meeting we begin with a check-in to see how everyone is doing. We did that, and received our edition of The Sycamore, had a wee thumb through and then talked about what the coming year would look like; for instance, our meeting space. We moved from our usual room at Bethel Church into the church's gym, where we could meet and safely distance ourselves from one another as per Covid protocols. It seemed that a gym would not be as comfortable and friendly as our small cozy room, but it was a hit. It turned out to be a fine spot to meet.

Also, we welcomed a new journeyer to the Associates as well as the Glace Bay group, as well as Sr. Jovita MacPherson – who, if you're reading this, you know needs no introduction! – and while we're very happy about that, we also lost Sr. Dorothy Moore as she moved to Antigonish, leaving a fair-sized hole in the dynamic of our meetings.

In November, Sr. Jovita gave a talk to the group about her ministry, leaving her familiar territory of Halifax and coming to Cape Breton. It was an inspiring talk that could instill a sense of hope, faith and charity in a stone! We are so lucky to have Sr. Jovita with us.

Covid won the December round and we could not meet.

In January, to mark her 200th birthday, we put together a session/talk on the life of St. Elizabeth Seton. We learned much about her and how her legacy reaches into the present and into the corners of Nova Scotia where, even in the corners of Cape Breton people live in Seton Homes, fine, solid homes built to accommodate people who need a good, affordable home. All of us, in other words.

In January, too, we were enjoying the gym very much and the winter switch to Sunday afternoon meetings from the Wednesday evening meetings.

In February, Julia did a presentation on the Martha Direction Statement and we spent some time reviewing it and offering our reflections on the statement.

In March, Mike did a musical meditation on Lent... a bit of a biographical journey of music and faith throughout his life.

In April, our group was fortunate to have as a speaker Deacon Lorne MacNeil, who spoke about life as a Deacon and in particular, his role in prison ministry. Very interesting talk!

Alas, May – the month of Mary – for which we had a rosary planned, and a Mass for Shut-Ins, went to Covid. And so did our June meeting. Two years in a row with no year-end potluck.

For the moment, here in late June, though, things are looking up. We hope that the 2021/22 year will open up its doors to hugs and handshakes. Until then, stay safe and happy everyone!

Mike Finigan

“ A little bit of mercy makes the world less cold and more just.”

Pope Francis

Western Associates Contribute to the Bench Project

This past year has been like no other and coming together as community has been almost non-existent. The Martha Associates from Lethbridge and Calgary however, found a unique and special way to honor all Associates while safely coming 'together'. We contributed to the Martha Retreat Centre's fund-raising event called the Bench Project.

The Martha Retreat Centre is located on the east side of Lethbridge. It is positioned on almost 5 acres of land on the edge of the coulee. No matter where you are on the property, God's magnificent glory can be seen for miles. The Bench Project's goal was to find generous donors to purchase 10 benches. Each bench was made from 72 Kg of recyclable plastics. The benches were strategically placed on the Centre's property, each with a unique, breath-taking view. Diana Sim, Executive Director for the Centre, invited Father Kevin Tumback, from All Saints Parish, to bless each bench. Several associates attended this ceremony.

We, Martha Associates, selected the bench that is near the Centre's front entrance. This was chosen as a symbol of gospel hospitality welcoming those coming to the Centre. This summer our bench was enjoyed by many seeking the shade of the big spruce trees. Birds sang as the friends of the Centre sat in stillness welcoming the Spirit to sit with them.

This bench is a gift from our present associates, as a memorial to our past members, and as a place of stillness for our future members. The plaque reads,

Martha Associates

Past – Present – Future

"In hospitality and companionship with each other, let us be challenged and blessed as we step into the future with undaunted hope. We make this prayer through Jesus Christ. Amen."

The Bench Project sold all 10 benches and the benches have welcomed over a hundred friends to the Centre's grounds. COVID may have restricted us from gathering inside, however, it offered our community an opportunity to create a beautiful 'room' outside. Thank you fellow associates for your generosity and prayers which enabled us to have our own special place on the grounds.

To our eastern associates, please consider coming to the Martha Retreat Centre when you travel west. We have a special place for you to be still and 'come rest awhile'. May God bless you and your family with His grace and care. And may we, see God more clearly, love God more dearly and follow God more nearly, day by day. Amen.

Yours in St. Martha,
Kathy Gillis
Martha Associate



Western Associates donate Bench
Martha Retreat Centre,
Lethbridge, Alberta



Bench Project - Bench Marker
Martha Retreat Centre,
Lethbridge, Alberta



Bench at Martha Retreat
Centre,
Lethbridge, Alberta

My Garden



This year was a different year for me. A year like no other. I am a person who loves gardening, growing flowers and vegetables and experiencing the pleasure of watching them grow. This year I neglected my garden. I did not tend to it, weed it, prune it or fertilize it. I bought packages of vegetable and flower seeds and did not plant them! I felt a sense of hopelessness during this pandemic year. I gave up!!

Indeed this was a very different gardening year for me. Instead of concentrating on sowing seeds and bragging about my bumper crop, I learned! My garden became a wonderful teacher.

Today I decided to walk through my garden and take some pictures. Despite my neglect and all the weeds my perennials survived, grew and flowered. The bumblebees love the lavender. The chives are ready for picking. I saw that life goes on. There is hope.

God has given me messages in so many ways. I realized He reached out His hand to guide me through this difficult year. He did this through my garden. These plants grew through less than ideal conditions and survived and so can I. I could feel a wave of peace and calm throughout my body. I let go of all my fears and just put myself in God's hands.

This pandemic had its negative effects but it was also positive. My little garden was and is a beautiful teacher. This very different gardening year is one that I will always treasure and never forget. I consider myself so fortunate and blessed that I was able to open my eyes and see.

Julie Dzaich





**Eastern Group
Associates &
Sisters**

**Western Group
Associates & Sisters**



“History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but, if faced with courage, need not be lived again. ”

Maya Angelou

Gratitude

I dare to say that life is good, our gratitude expands,
As we think of the creative spirit that exists in space and lands.

Plant and animal life flourish, as space becomes quite small.
No human mind provides such order, we thank God for it all.

Our human world can be quite troubling, discerning actions that are best.
Yet we gather. laugh, celebrate the many ways that we are blessed.

God creates and gives us freedom, to be grateful or demanding,
In small ways we promote the world's greater understanding.

Unborn, baby, child and teen, loved and valued as they grow.
To responsible adulthood choosing the direction each will go.

We will support, and guide, and trust, the gift of freedom each enjoys.
Responding is as personal, as choosing favorite toys.

We all make many different choices what we think and do and say,
Being grateful for Creator's loving presence, each and every day!

By Mary MacLean,
PEI Martha Associate

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The Martha Website is: www.themarthas.com

Any Associate group who has news items or pictures that speak of the life of your faith community
please email material to Julia Townsend at julia.townsend@themarthas.com

Submitted items may appear on the website or in our newsletter.
Please help keep our new and website current.