



The Eagle

Epiphanytide 2020

Dear Associates, Oblates and Friends,



Sr. Elizabeth

As I look out the window at the beauty of last night's fresh snowfall, I feel so grateful for our Beloved Community and for each of our sisters who were drawn to a vocation in the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine. On January 4th I was re-elected as Reverend Mother of SSJD, a role which can sometimes seem overwhelming,

but then I remember that every sister participates in the leadership of SSJD and I am grateful for their lives of love, prayer and service.

We have had the joy of three Companions living with us for the last few months. They are a breath of fresh air, each one offering her unique talents to



Companions Florence Au, Jasmine Lo and Kelsea Willis, with Sr. Constance Joanna standing

our ministries. Companions have been extremely helpful in putting together our new seasonal binders for the Divine Office which we began using in Advent. We hope our guests will find them easier to use in our worship.

As life becomes ever more complex, we decided to hire a part-time Human Resources Consultant who can help us with all the rules and regulations we need to be aware of regarding our employees. Scott Hilborn joined us in November and has already been of great help.

We have continued to have a full Guest House for our retreats and quiet Saturdays, including the Christmas and New Year's Retreats. One couple has attended every New Year's Retreat since 2009, the year we received free advertising from *The Toronto Star* for this retreat.



Sr. Constance Joanna anoints Sr. Brenda at Sr. Brenda's Profession Anniversary Eucharist

On December 6th, Feast of St. Nicholas, we celebrated Sr. Brenda's 25th Profession Anniversary. It was a truly joyous event and even included a tiny bit of dancing as the sisters left the chapel. *See centrespread for Sr. Sue's homily at the profession.*

Due to a couple of unforeseen circumstances, we had to buy a new car in December to replace two of our older ones. We seriously considered buying an electric car, but after much discussion, we decided to wait until the next time we needed a car to buy

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an electric one. So now we have a bright SSJD blue KIA to match our habits! We wanted a car we could find more easily in a parking lot!

Christmas and New Year are always a busy time at the convent with two retreats and many guests who come for the Christmas Day Eucharist followed by a turkey dinner with all the trimmings. We had the joy of having eleven members of Sr. Amy Joy's family from Toronto, Los Angeles and Hong Kong join us for this festive occasion. Sr. Amy Joy had decided in November that she needed more discernment time before going forward to Life Profession.



Archbishop Fred Hiltz tinkles his ox-bell.

Archbishop Fred Hiltz who was our presiding celebrant for the Eucharist brought an ox-bell with him, a gift he had received a few years earlier. He shared memories of Christmas services when he was the incumbent at St. John's Anglican Church, Lunenburg. They had real animals (sheep, goats and an ox) present for the service. You can perhaps imagine the impact of that. He brought this ox-bell with him and rang it during the service. It added a very special tone to our celebration of Christmas.

On the first Sunday after Christmas, Archbishop Colin Johnson, our presiding celebrant, also brought something very special: a creche scene from the Holy Land made of olive wood. It was unlike any we had ever seen before. Initially it looks like any other creche scene, with Mary, Joseph, and the baby plus an angel and a star. The tower is a little unusual however. When Archbishop Colin turned the creche around to show the magi visiting, he explained that the tower was a watchtower like the watchtowers that are part of the wall around Bethlehem. There's a door between the back and the front, like the gate visitors to Bethlehem must go through. This creche says a great deal about the



A creche scene with a watchtower, like the watchtowers that are a part of the wall around present-day Bethlehem.



The magi have to negotiate the wall to get to Bethlehem.

times we live in. May each of us bring God's love and compassion to our corners of the world in 2020.

With love and prayers for you all,

**Sr. Elizabeth, SSJD
Reverend Mother**

From Our Archives

Dear Readers:

We have recently been organizing our SSJD Archives and have discovered some interesting letters and memos we would like to share with you. The first one below is a description of the beginnings of the Sisterhood by our Mother Foundress Hannah Grier Coome.

MEMORANDUM BY THE REVEREND MOTHER FOUNDERESS S.S.J.D.

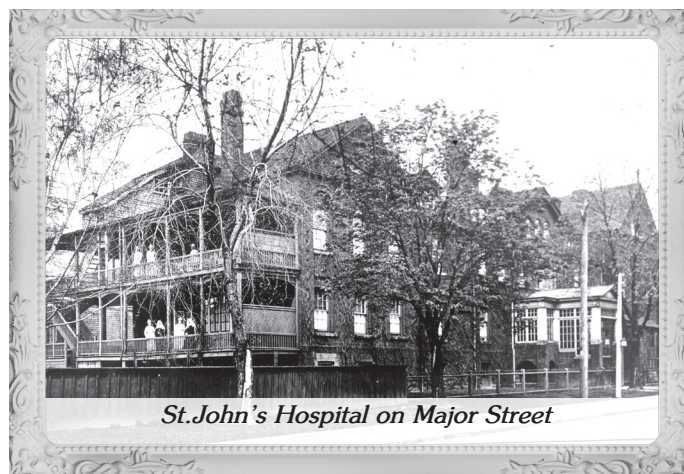
Part 1

“We arrived in Toronto September 8th, 1884. Beginning in a small house on Robinson Street with two ladies resident with me, one of whom became a most valued Sister. Another came shortly after. Mission work in St. Matthias’ Parish until called to the North West to nurse the wounded in 1885. Took three members of our household, and three other ladies who were trained nurses. I had charge of Base Hospital at Moosejaw throughout the Riel Rebellion.



“Our work there apparently removed the early prejudice against Sisters in our Branch of the Church – a Society quite unknown in Canada then. Urgent need for nursing was felt, and we were induced to begin a Hospital for Women in a pretty cottage adjoining our house. From this small beginning the now well-known and well-equipped St. John’s Hospital has developed. The cornerstone was laid in June 1888 (just before the death of our first Warden, Rev. O.P. Ford) by the Bishop of Toronto in the presence of a very large gathering of Clergy (Bishops of Niagara, Hamilton, and 30 Clergymen)

the choirs of several Churches under direction of Rev. F.G. Plummer and concourse of people. The procession extended from St. Stephen’s Church where they had vested, to the grounds on Major



Street, where the foundations of the Convent and Hospital were laid.

“In 1889 we occupied the premises – the Dedication was by the Bishop – after the death of the first Warden. Dr. Bethune became Warden, but living in Port Hope he could not give the necessary ministrations, and Mr. Roper generously accepted the Chaplaincy, and gave devoted service for eleven years, until he was called to New York. In 1892 the Permanent Chapel was built, merely the shell of the present Chapel, which has been enriched by Memorial gifts from time to time until it is complete and beautiful. By a legacy from Mr. Kingsley the property was set free from debt in 1907. A further legacy from Mrs. Tucker enabled us to add St. Elizabeth house where are additional dormitory accommodations and rooms for aged or invalid Sisters. This wing connects the Chapel building with the Guest House on Brunswick Avenue.”

(To be continued in the next issue of The Eagle.)

Correction

In the Michaelmas Eagle we omitted the name of Elizabeth Murray, one of our long-time Associates, in the list of Special Anniversaries. Elizabeth became an Associate in 1974, and celebrated her 45th anniversary of being an Associate in 2019.

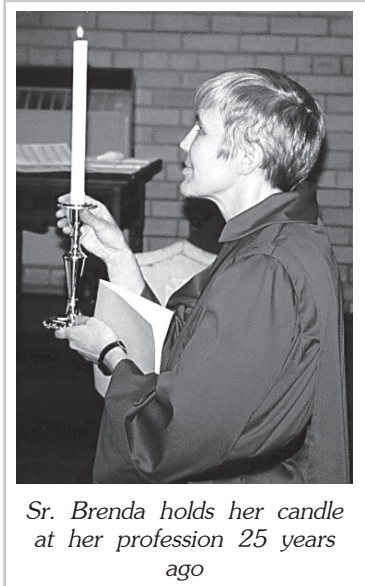
Sr. Brenda's 25th Profession Anniversary – Dec. 6, 2019

Homily by Sr. Sue

Readings: 1 John 4.7-14; Psalm 37; John 21.15–19 [and Philippians 2.8; Micah 6.8]

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Good afternoon. Today we are keeping the Feast of St. Nicholas of Myra and celebrating the 25th Anniversary of Sr. Brenda's profession of Vows. I'm not going to preach on St. Nicholas, or on Sr. Brenda, which leaves the readings, as is right and proper.



Sr. Brenda holds her candle at her profession 25 years ago

As I read over the scripture passages chosen for today, I found myself thinking of the vows we live by, the vows Brenda made 25 years ago today.

Both epistle and Gospel focus on love, the psalm on trust, and the Gospel alludes to obedience.

You may be asking now: what is she talking about: OK, obedience is one of the vows, but love and trust? Where do they come in? And where is she seeing obedience? There's no mention of obedience here.

Love is actually pretty obvious. To quote our Rule of Life: “The vow of chastity is grounded in the wholeness of love with which Jesus embraced humanity and all creation.”

As for obedience. At the end of our Gospel passage, Jesus says to Peter: “When you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” This refers to Peter's martyrdom, and calls to mind—to my mind at least—the hymn found in Philippians 2.8: “Being found in human form, [Jesus] humbled himself and became

obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” As Jesus was obedient unto death (it's not often I prefer the King James version, but I do like it better here)—as Jesus was obedient unto death, so was Peter, and Paul and all of the martyrs. To go back to our Rule of Life, “The vow of obedience is grounded in the singleness of purpose with which Jesus lived in order to accomplish the will of the One who sent him.”

So, we've got chastity (love) and obedience. What about poverty? I often struggle with the idea of poverty, or rather the idea of the vow of poverty. What does it mean? Does it mean that we live in material poverty, struggling for food and shelter and clothing? Obviously not. Our Rule says that “the Vow of Poverty is grounded in the simplicity of life which Jesus lived and taught”, and a bit further on, “To be poor in spirit is to claim nothing as ours by right, but to reconcile to God, at all levels, the demands of self-seeking, self-preservation and self-security. In poverty we bear witness that God is our whole support.” And what is that, really, but trust?

So, that's how the readings refer to the vows; what do the vows mean? Or rather, how do we live them out?

Poverty is living in simplicity and in trust of God. Love, I think, is *chesed*: loving kindness. It is not always, though it can be, a sense of affection for another; rather it is that action of loving kindness toward another, an action of concern. It is the putting aside of negative feelings to act positively to and for another.

And what about obedience? We've already heard one definition: “the singleness of purpose with which Jesus lived in order to accomplish the will of the One who sent him.” To be quite clear, this is



Sr. Brenda in her white habit

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NOT blind obedience. It is not the obedience of the German soldier carrying out orders to murder the Jews and the gypsies and the communists during the Holocaust. It is not the obedience of a bureaucratic functionary who carries out rules without concern for circumstances, or the needs and motives of those to whom the rules apply. It is not even the obedience of a young adult who continues racist or anti-Semitic attitudes because a parent says to do so.



Sr. Brenda engages with some children as a teacher's assistant in Edmonton

Then what is it? It is what we are called to do, how we are called to act, by God. For most of us at most times, that call from God is expressed through, or at least not in contradiction to, the various authorities in our life: the novitiate director, the reverend mother, our spiritual directors. Beyond our community, the authority of government and law.

This is obedience for most of us, at most times: not for all of us, and not at all times. Even for those of us lucky enough to live in a country like Canada, where most of the laws are just and most of the authorities are honest, there are times and circumstances where obedience to God requires civil disobedience: perhaps in defence of our planet, or in defence of the oppressed who live among us in even the best of societies. There may even be times when the authority of our community seems based not on God's will but on the will of faulty human beings.

What is God's will? What is "the singleness of purpose with which Jesus lived in order to accomplish

the will of the One who sent him"? Is it not justice?

As Micah has said "[God] has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

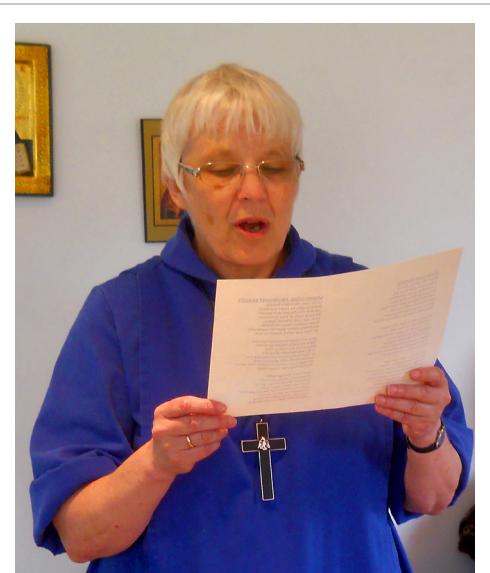
Surely, these are the vows we are called to make.

But having established what the vows are, the next question is HOW? How do we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God? How do we practise poverty and chastity and obedience?

I suggest that doing these things requires detachment. To practise the vow of poverty, we need to let go of attachments to material goods: clothing, food, shelter, etc. Not to ignore our needs for these things, but to ignore the messages of our culture (and our worst selves) that tell us that fulfillment can be found by amassing these material goods, by having more food, more clothing, fancier shelter; for some of us, more books, more works of art, more musical instruments. To practise poverty, we need to let go not of the things themselves but of our desire for the things.

To practise the vow of chastity, we need to detach from other people: not to refrain from treating others with *chesed*, with loving-kindness, but to let go of our attachments, the attachments which convince us that we cannot live without the other, that we must have their love, their approval, their company to feel fulfilled. To practise chastity, we need to let go not of people but of our desire for those people and what they can give us.

To practise the vow of obedience we need to detach from our ego: our sense that we know best,



Sr. Brenda sings the Office in the BC Chapel

Continued from page 5

that we can control our own lives and the lives of others; that if only we had complete control over all things, all things would be good and proper and we would find fulfillment there. We need to let go our self-will if we are to practise obedience.

So, poverty, chastity, obedience: detachment from desire for material goods, for another person, for our own ego and self-will—these are the vows and this is the keeping of the vows.

I said at the beginning that I would not be preaching on Sr. Brenda; I'm going to take that back,

quite briefly. Brenda chose the readings we have heard today. I believe she chose them because they exemplified for her what matters in the Religious Life—in her life in religion. Within these readings, as I have said, I found the vows of the religious life. I also found myself thinking that as the readings exemplify the religious life for Brenda, so Brenda exemplifies these readings for me. I have known her for almost twenty years, and see in her the loving-kindness, the trust and the obedience that lay the foundation of our life in God.

Amen.”



A Saints and Virtues Tree

At the Associates Epiphany Tea in 2020 we had a Saints & Virtues Tree, after a break of a few years. A Saints and Virtues tree is a tree decorated with small paper tokens with the name of a Saint on one side and a Virtue on the facing side. Living the virtues helps us get more in tune with God.

We invited Associates to choose a token and to learn all they could about the Saint and to try to develop the suggested virtue over the next year!

The Houses of the Sisterhood

www.ssjd.ca

St. John's Convent

233 Cummer Ave., Toronto, ON
M2M 2E8

416-226-2201 FAX: 416-226-2131

email: convent@ssjd.ca

St. John's House, BC

3937 St. Peters Road, Victoria, BC
V8P 2J9

250-920-7787 Fax: 250-920-7709

email: bchouse@ssjd.ca

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The Sisterhood of St. John the Divine is a registered charity.

Our charitable donation number is
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From the Fundraising office

416-226-2201 ext 303 or fundraising @ssjd.ca



Some years ago, we, the Sisters of St. John the Divine realized it was necessary to find a way to raise funds to finance our new convent and continue our ministries. Out of this realization the Living Stones campaign was created in 2004.

We needed help to raise funds to take us into the future we envisioned, and to which we believed God was calling us. You, our faithful friends, became valued links in the Living Stones campaign and helped us move into the future that is today's reality. Your generosity is still vital and we are so grateful for your loyalty.

Today we would like to suggest PAR (Pre-Authorized Remittance) as a good way to continue to support us. Through this regular monthly donation program you spread your donations out over a period of time and provide us with a dependable base of support which allows us to budget more effectively.

The PAR program is affordable, flexible, effective and convenient for you:

- You can choose your monthly gift to start as low as \$10 per month, and can modify it at any time if your circumstances change
- You can make your monthly donation by automatic deduction from your bank account or by credit card

Your monthly PAR gift provides the Sisterhood with:

- A steady, predictable source of income to ensure we can consistently support and expand our ministries, e.g. spiritual care, spiritual direction, hospitality in the convent and guest house
- A donation program with low administrative costs
- An ability to plan ahead and invest in long-term stewardship of our resources

HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN PAR

The Pre-Authorized Remittance (PAR) donation program is administered by the United Church of Canada and supports many church congregations in Canada. PAR is easy to start, adjust or cancel at any time.

1. Prayerfully decide what you will give each year, and divide that amount by 12.
2. Fill out the authorization form, available at the convent or download through our website, and attach a cheque marked "VOID".
3. Enclose both in an envelope and mail to the Fundraising Department of the Sisterhood of Saint John the Divine or scan the documents and void cheque and email to fundraising@ssjd.ca.
4. The amount will be transferred from your account to SSJD on the 20th of each month. You can modify or cancel your donation, change how it is designated, or change your information at any time.
5. Taxable donation receipts will be issued and forwarded to you at the end of the calendar year by the Sisterhood of Saint John the Divine.

Thank you for being a strong link of love alongside us through your generosity and shared service.



IF YOU DONATE THROUGH YOUR CREDIT CARD

you are now required to give your CVV number (the three-digit number on the back of your credit card) which has been included on our donation envelope.

An opportunity for
Women at a Crossroads
July 3 – 26, 2020

The program assists women to discern where God may be calling them. Classes include: Vocation and Discernment; Contemplative Prayer; Journaling and Awareness Reflection; Prayer and Art; Prayer Walking and Labyrinth; Anglican Rosary.



For further information and application form, contact:

Kelly Clark, St. John's Convent
233 Cummer Avenue
Toronto, Ontario M2M 2E8
Phone: 416-226-2201, Ext. 301
Fax: 416-222-4442
Email: convent@ssjd.ca

Deadline for all application material:

APRIL 1, 2020.

Applicants will be notified by April 15, 2020

In choosing participants, we strive for a balance of background and experience.

The Sisterhood of St John the Divine (Anglican)

Spend a year living in
God's Rhythm



The Anglican Sisterhood of St. John the Divine invites women of any denomination, from the age of 21 and up, to travel as Companions along an ancient path from **Sept. 2020 – July 2021.**

Companions will develop a rhythm of life, including public and private prayer, engaging in service to others, and learning to live in intentional community.

Applications are now open for the 2020-2021 cohort (beginning in September 2020). Applications will be processed as received.

Final deadline: **June 15, 2020.**

For more information and application forms, contact Sister Constance Joanna:
companions@ssjd.ca or 416-226-2201, ext. 316.