



# The Eagle

Easter 2021

**Dear Associates, Oblates and Friends,**



*Sr. Elizabeth*

**I**n the last two *Eagles*, I shared with you the impact of Covid-19 on the sisters. We have now been living with the pandemic for over a year and have been in lockdown mode in Toronto since some time in November or December.

Our experience of the pandemic has

been different from most other people because we have been living in a bubble of 25 or 26 people and have staff coming in every day for the kitchen, housekeeping, and the infirmary. During the summer, many of us were able to go to our cottage in the Muskokas for holidays which was a great blessing. Sr. Elizabeth Ann took advantage of holiday time at Port Sydney by putting together two Muskoka chairs for our summer cottage, Bally Croy.



*Sr. Elizabeth Ann assembles Muskoka chair*

Like many of you, none of us could visit our families. It was particularly difficult for Sr. Louise whose sister died early this year out in BC and Louise had not been able to visit her during the previous year because of Covid-19.

Those of us who enjoy gardening had a longer season than usual because the weather was mild right into November. As part of our care for the planet, we purchased 60 little evergreen trees to plant on our property: white pine, hemlock and two varieties of spruce trees. Most of them were planted on the west side of the

driveway between us and Cummer Lodge and a few on the north side close to Cummer Avenue.

In some ways our life has not changed very much. We still have Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer and Compline every day except Mondays and we have our two hours of personal prayer every day. Our organist, Dan Norman, has not been with us for several weeks because of the stricter lockdown in January; we really miss him at the Sunday Eucharist. Sr. Connie has been both pianist and presider! Occasionally Fr. Brian Freeland delivers the homily, which is wonderful.

Many of us have also been watching Dean Robert Willis of Canterbury Cathedral who leads Morning Prayer every day. Whenever possible he is in the deanery gardens, often with some of his animal friends including several cats, rooster and chickens, guinea fowl, a white duck, and the pigs, Winnie and Clemmie and all their piglets. I particularly appreciate his teaching on the lesson for the day. It's a great way to start each morning.

As we no longer have the daily Eucharist, we miss the regular rota of priests who came to preside at the Eucharist and to preach. We were spoiled by all the different voices and styles which we have enjoyed for so many years. However, quite a few sisters have agreed to preach once a month or every two months. I had the unusual experience, on the Feast of Mother Hannah, of preaching at the College of Emmanuel and St. Chad in Saskatoon at the same time as I was preaching in our chapel in Toronto. Their service began at 11 a.m. and ours at noon, so with the time difference I was preaching in two places at once! Only possible through modern technology that we're all getting used to using. If you go on our website ([www.ssjd.ca](http://www.ssjd.ca)), you will find the sisters' homilies in the section "About Us".

The sisters who provide spiritual care at St. John's Rehab were able to visit patients beginning in

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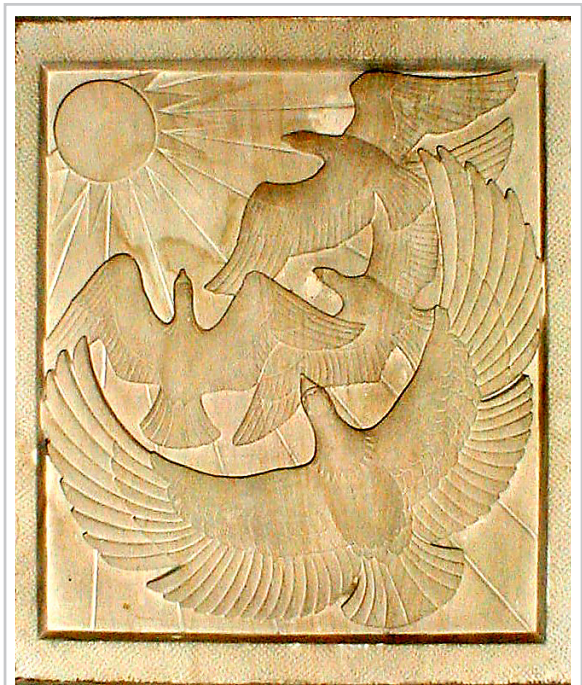
mid-September; unfortunately, in early December, there was an outbreak of Covid-19 and so the sisters' visits had to stop. We hope they might be able to return some time in March or April.



*New Advent candles and antependium*

Since I last wrote, we have celebrated Advent and Christmas. Sr. Anne made a new antependium for Advent to hang on the front of the ambo, and Fr. Brian Freeland gave us new oil-burning candles for our Advent wreath.

Sr. Connie has been giving some wonderful classes on Zoom. She's now on her 3<sup>rd</sup> series. It has been a steep learning curve, especially organizing people into discussion groups. Sr. Doreen has given several quiet days for Associates on Zoom. What is difficult about teaching on Zoom, or having meetings on Zoom, is that one cannot read people's faces and body language, especially in a large group. What is wonderful about Zoom is that people from across Canada or the U.S. can attend and participate. It's not the same as being with one another in person, but many people have appreciated being able to at least see the sisters and the other participants. The sisters also took part in the National Service for Christian Unity in February. You can find our part of the service on our website. At the time of writing all but three sisters have been vaccinated twice against Covid-19 because we are classified as senior and "congregant living", a group with a high priority. A team from Sunnybrook brought the vaccination clinic to the convent so



*Eagle panel of altar of  
St. John's Chapel*

most of our staff were able to be vaccinated at the same time. Sr. Jocelyn is the only one to have tested positive to the virus but that was after being in hospital for 10 days for a different issue. She and Sr. Brenda, who picked her up, lived in isolation in the Guest House for the required time and several of us who had already been vaccinated twice took their meals over to them. Fortunately, because she had had her first vaccination, Sr. Jocelyn's symptoms were minimal.

We are using this present time to do some visioning to discern what God might be calling us to be or do at this time in our history. We all know there is no going back to normal but we don't yet know what the new-normal will be.

In the meantime we are beginning a new program which is very exciting: Companions Online: June, 2021 – April, 2022. The purpose is to help people cultivate a life of prayer and spiritual community in the midst of family, study, and career. You can find out more information on our website. We hope we'll be able to share more with you in the next *Eagle*.

We do miss you all. May you have a Blessed Holy Week and Easter.

**Sr. Elizabeth, SSJD,  
Reverend Mother**



## Reflections on the Pandemic

The last year has brought many changes both subtle and significant for most people but I can say that for me it has been a time of gentle comfort.

Being an introvert who has lived alone for 45 years, the time on my own has not been onerous. It has in fact in many ways been pleasant. The demands of others have lessened significantly and allowed me to reflect on what is truly important to me and how to stay focused on that. It has allowed me to be available when needed but not to feel the need to engage in order to step out of myself but rather to genuinely seek the people and places I should make part of my life.

I have developed a routine of Morning and Evening Prayer from the BAS and on Sunday, the BCP; and added, in the morning, a time of reflection on a theological or spiritual text which have included *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Teilhard de Chardin's *The Future of Man* among many others. This is followed by journaling, prayer, and meditation, although I will confess the meditation is the least successful part. More practice required!

All of this has grounded me in a significant way and given structure to what had been a less disciplined approach. The 90 minutes a day I spend like this are the most enjoyable and carefree of the entire day. I will carry this practice forward and expand it in the future, adding more focused time for meditation, perhaps after evening prayer.

This, coupled with the rigors of my MTS studies, has expanded my knowledge, commitment, and love for scripture and liturgy, and brought me closer to God. I have learned that to pray is to listen and not always speak but to be open to the will of God.

The regular rhythm of our scripted prayers provides the framework for the real prayer of listening. As my days are spent with my cat for companionship and my thoughts for inspiration, I am constantly forming prayer by expressing what I want or need in my daily ruminations and then responding to what I am being given by God in the context of our current situation.



Daily concerns for money to support my studies, increased ability to learn, good health and a positive outlook have all been abundantly provided for, and more.

This time has made me aware of how unprepared I really was for undertaking God's work in an ordained capacity but has now awakened gifts I did not know I had and provided me with ways to continue to learn, grow and discern the path ahead of me.

With age hopefully comes wisdom and a more peaceful demeanour. I know that, impatient as I am, that time will be provided for me to become the servant God wants me to be.

**Annette Procunier, Discerning Associate**

### Associate emails

We are in the process of updating our email lists and need your help. If you have recently acquired an email address, or have changed yours in the last 18 months, would you please send this information to:

**Associates@ssjd.ca.**

Many thanks,  
**Associate Office**

## A Journey from Creation to Resurrection:

In one of the most famous Christian classics of all times, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the poet begins by saying,

Midway in our life's journey, I went  
astray  
from the straight road and woke to  
find myself  
alone in a dark wood.

The *Divine Comedy* continues with the dramatic and symbolic narrative of Dante's spiritual journey, from darkness and death to light and life.

Although Dante wrote around 1300, the imagery of pilgrims and journeys is millenia old – at least as old as the oral tradition behind the Hebrew scriptures. Adam and Eve started a journey the moment they were exiled from Eden, and worshippers of God since then have seen themselves as “strangers and sojourners,” pilgrims seeking their place in God's household (Ephesians 2.19). The Book of Exodus contains the most famous of all the journeys of the Old Testament, as the Israelites are led in a dramatic journey from slavery to freedom, only to endure many more years of being pilgrims and sojourners in the lands of other people, with many other deliverances.

In keeping with their Hebrew background, the Christians of the first century were called people of “The Way,” because they followed a spiritual path that gave meaning to the whole of their personal lives as well as their corporate lives. They saw in Jesus, as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews puts it, “the pioneer and perfecter” of their faith (12.2), and the way of salvation for the whole creation.

The journey motif has continued throughout Christian literature. Dante wrote in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, but his theme is not much different from that of John Bunyan, writing *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, or C.S. Lewis, writing the *Narnia Chronicles* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

At various points in each of our lives, we awaken, like Dante, to find ourselves in the middle of a dark wood, wondering where to find the path that leads

to God and a renewal of our purpose and identity. Sometimes this dark wood represents an inner forest, as we approach a turning point in our relationship with God, in our understanding of ourselves, or in our relationships with the people we are closest to. Sometimes this dark wood seems more external, as we face some decision about career or vocation or family. Sometimes, as during this pandemic, the dark wood seems full of lurking beasts that are threatening human life on our planet.

*I will give you  
a new heart ♥  
and put a new  
Spirit within you*  
Ezek. 36

Whatever the dark wood might represent for each of us at this moment in our life's journey, we can be sure it will involve both our inner and our outer worlds. If we are facing a crossroads in our relationship with God, a call to a closer relationship with Jesus, it will affect our external life as well. If we are facing a decision in our external circumstances, it will not be authentic unless it comes from the centre of who we are as people, in relation to the God who created us and redeems us.

As I write this article in the second week of Lent, I look forward to the Great Vigil of Easter, the high point for me of our Christian journey through the liturgical year. And though most people may not be able to attend in person this year, we can all share in various on-line observances in parish churches and cathedrals locally and even around the world.

All through Lent we listen to readings from the scriptures that take us further down the road, deeper into the forest, travelling the dark way of Jesus until the hounding and bullying by religious and secular authorities finally ends with the horror of his crucifixion. But the journey is not over for Jesus

*Continued on page 4*

## The Great Vigil of Easter

*Continued from page 3*

or for us when we get to Good Friday. Jesus is raised to new life by God, and we who travel with Jesus also are called to resurrection and new life.

The Great Vigil prepares us for that resurrection. In the dark, the priest blesses the Easter candle and lights the new fire, and then everyone follows the Deacon in a procession – a pilgrimage – behind the great candle, as the Deacon sings triumphantly “The Light of Christ” three times; and three times we respond gratefully “Thanks be to God.” Then we sit in the semi-darkness of the church, each holding our small candle lit from the Easter candle, and listen to stories of our salvation history – much as the ancient Hebrews might have sat around a fire and listened to the stories of their ancestors.

We hear stories of the creation of the world, Noah and the flood, Abraham’s sacrifice, the Exodus, Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones, and the other prophecies that proclaim God’s redemption and the coming of the Messiah – all these tell a wonderful and powerful story. It is our story, yours and mine, the story of our creation in innocence, of our separation and sin, of our repeated contrition and repentance and God’s repeated forgiveness, of our repeated deaths and resurrections, and of our looking forward to our physical death and union with God in the final resurrection.

The journey of the Israelites is more than a metaphor for our own journeys; there is an intimate, spiritual connection between the two. Biologists tell us that the history of humanity is repeated in miniature in the biological history of each individual, from the moment of conception on. Similarly, our individual psychological, social, and spiritual histories repeat, with wonderful individual variations, the history of human cultures. We can see in the Bible the development of humanity’s understanding of God, just as our own understanding of God grows as we mature in our relationships with our Creator and those with whom we share our planet.

COME  
ALL YOU WHO ARE THIRSTY  
COME  
ALL YOU WHO ARE THIRSTY  
COME  
ALL YOU WHO ARE THIRSTY  
COME  
ALL YOU WHO ARE THIRSTY  
COME TO THE WATERS ..

*Isa. 65*

This notion that our personal lives reflect the life of the world and the human community is a very old one in Christian thought. Origen, a third-century theologian and saint, said:

You yourself are even another little world and have within you the sun and the moon and also the stars.

I encourage you to use the Easter Vigil readings for your own reflection during Lent, or even after Easter, as a mirror of your own life’s journey. And when you find yourself in a dark wood, have confidence that God’s deep love throughout our salvation history, and culminating in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is upholding and strengthening you as Jesus was upheld and reborn.

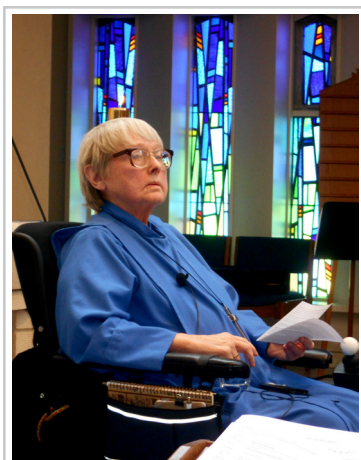
Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

Alleluia! Thanks be to God!

**Sr. Constance Joanna, SSJD**



## Sr. Sue: Monastic, Teacher, Poet, Creative Woodworker, Wise Woman



Sr. Sue

Susan Frances Elwyn was born in Peekskill, New York on November 11, 1949 and died at the Toronto General Hospital in Toronto, Ontario on September 24, 2020. Sue was in her 71<sup>st</sup> year of life and in her 14<sup>th</sup> year of religious profession.

Sr. Sue was predeceased by her parents, David Hunter Elwyn and Elizabeth Leacock Elwyn and is survived by her three birth sisters, Katy, Laura and Rachel and their families, in the United States.

Sr. Sue received her B.A. degree in Ancient History at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri and her M.A. and Ph.D. in Classics at the University of Pennsylvania. She taught classical languages at Brigham Young University in Utah and Latin and English literature at West Nottingham Academy in Maryland.

Sue entered the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine in Toronto, Canada on June 29, 2000 at the age of fifty years. She was clothed on January 18, 2001, first professed on November 11, 2003 and Life Professed on October 18, 2006.

During her time in community Sue worked in many different departments including the chapel, the Associate Office, the Guest House, Maintenance, St. John's Rehab and as convent staff liaison.

Her branch house time was spent in two different houses: Maison St-Jean in Montreal, Quebec and St. John's House in Victoria, British Columbia. Sue was also the first sister to serve on the Board of Directors of Sunnybrook once SJR and Sunnybrook amalgamated.

Regardless of her assigned work, Sue was always a teacher and shared this gift through leading retreats, providing spiritual direction, teaching Education for Ministry (EfM), teaching novitiate classes, preaching, and mentoring. It was during her time in Victoria that Sue first

became seriously ill, and from that point on she was never entirely well again.

Sue returned to the convent from Victoria in the summer of 2017 and moved into a room in the Infirmary. Places had been reserved for her in both the chapel and the refectory, but she never used them. She took her meals in the Infirmary and on the rare occasion she physically attended chapel she came on her scooter.

*Continued on page 7*

### Creator God



1. Cre - a - tor, God, my gov - er - nor, my  
2. I've been your ser - vant; still I serve and  
3. You send me forth, each vow and pro - mise  
4. You've brought sal - va - tion clear, de - liv - erance



guide, you give me leave at last to  
will, from birth un - til all a - ges  
kept, ac - cor - ding to the pro - phets'  
sure, to ev - ery na - tion, set - tled,



go to that great space where  
end, and then, in peace and  
word. My eyes, which searched so  
wild, for Is - rael's glo - ry



ev - en stars do hide, their  
love, will I serve still, nor  
long, so oft - en wept, are  
hope of rich and poor is



fire in your more brill - iant glow.  
cease when time it - self you rend.  
op - ened now in joy as - sured.  
God, em - bod - ied in a child.

Text: Sr. Sue Elwyn, SSJD

Music: Sr. Thelma-Anne McLeod, SSJD (adapt. J.S. Bach "Dresden")

*Creator God text by Sr. Sue Elwyn, SSJD*

This is not to say that Sue was a passive observer of our common life; despite her physical limitations she participated as fully as she could. Sue contributed to our common life in the many ways she still could and was very much a visible presence in the community.

Sue may have been largely confined to her room, but she was always inviting people to come and visit her there. She wasn't much for small talk, but a visit with her was an opportunity to experience her friendship, her wisdom and her capacity for deep listening.

Two months after Sue's death the sisters gathered together one evening to specifically remember her. Everybody had a chance to talk and to share their memories. Sue was remembered as a sister, a friend, a teacher, a poet, a woodworker, a lover of rocks, and digger of holes. She was described as a steady person, as wise, gentle but firm, as not suffering fools gladly, as respectful but definite about her own thoughts.

In *Creator God* (Sue's paraphrase of the Song of Simeon) the aged Simeon says, "My eyes which searched so long, so often wept, are opened now in joy assured."

On the inside of every sister's life profession ring is engraved *Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi* (My beloved is mine and I am his). On September 24, 2020 Sue opened her eyes in 'joy assured' to the presence of her Beloved.

**Sr. Wendy Grace, SSJD**

### **From the Fundraising Office**

**W**ith the many adjustments due to Covid-19 the sisters have found the past year a difficult and unusual one, like everyone else in the world. Our convent and guest house have been closed since March 2020.

As we continue with lockdowns and restrictions into 2021 with projections indicating that most of 2021 will remain the same, we take this opportunity to express our gratitude to you for your friendship, love and support.

Some years ago at a Donor Appreciation event at the convent we quoted from a book *Liesl and Po* by Lauren Oliver. Liesl is a little girl, and Po is a ghost who begin a journey together. Po asks Liesl: "Thank you, what is that?" Liesl, after some thought, answers: "It means you're wonderful. It means we couldn't have done it without you."

It conveys from the Fundraising Office the most appropriate way to express our thanks over this past year and into 2021 within this pandemic situation. Thank you, it means that you are wonderful and we couldn't do it without you! Your friendship and support on this extraordinary journey together present a challenge to us. We are reminded of words spoken by J.F. Kennedy in one of his addresses to his country: "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them."

You call us to a life of radical gratitude, a life of not taking things for granted, of seeing life's glass as half full rather than as half empty: and in today's world that is a radical approach to life. Thank you for the challenge. We appreciate your prayers for us as we continue to live into that challenge each day.

With our love and prayer for each of you from the Fundraising Office.

**Sr. Wilma, SSJD & Sr. Doreen, SSJD**

*Living a year in God's rhythm*  
**The Companions Program**  
**September 2021 – July 2022**



*Do you desire to:*

- \* Discover a personal path to spiritual growth and transformation?
- \* Cultivate an appreciation for the countercultural values of prayerfulness and service?
- \* Deepen your rootedness and spiritual intimacy with God and each other in community?
- \* Discern your individual gifts?

The Anglican Sisters of St. John the Divine offer an eleven-month residential program for women who are seeking, discerning, and desiring a closer relationship with God and others.

**For more information, or to apply, contact:**



Shannon Frank-Epp, Coordinator

Email: [companions@ssjd.ca](mailto:companions@ssjd.ca)

Phone: 416-226-2201, Ext. 342

**Deadline for applications:** May 1, 2021

**Can't make it in person?**

**Consider The Online Companions Program!**

**Start date:** June 2021–April 2022

**Applications Deadline:** March 1, 2021

*For more information, or to apply:*

contact Shannon Frank-Epp, Companions Coordinator;  
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# The Sisterhood of St. John the Divine

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