



The Eagle

Easter 2022

Dear Associates, Oblates and Friends,



Sr. Elizabeth

As I begin this letter, we are in the first week of Lent. Yesterday the sun was shining and it was a relatively balmy day at 0°C. Today it is snowing again. The weather in Toronto this winter seems to be as changeable as the pandemic and its variants. At the beginning of November last year, we were able to invite clergy back to celebrate the Eucharist on a daily basis and then somewhere around mid-December, the Omicron variant took over and we had to ask our celebrants not to come. Now it's March and we rejoice in their return again.

Over the past two years we all have been learning to be flexible and resilient and to cope with constant change. Nothing seems to be definite until it happens. Can we open our Guest House or not? We opened it in the Fall for up to 10 guests and invited a very few guests for Christmas dinner, but

then we had to close down again. In the end only three guests were able to join us for Christmas Day and of course everyone had to be triple vaccinated, including the figures in the creche.

Back in November we planted another 35 or so evergreens on the west and east sides of our property. As you may remember we decided at Chapter several years ago to plant at least 25 trees each year (one for each member of the Sisterhood) for the sake of our planet. As you know, trees are the lungs of our planet and billions of trees are cut down each year around the world and that doesn't include those lost to forest fires. In our small way we are trying to do something positive to counteract this and pray that others will do the same.



2021 creche scene with Mary, Joseph and visitors duly masked.



Archbishop Linda Nicholls places ring on Sr. Kathryn's right hand.

On November 18, 2021, the Feast of St. Hilda of Whitby, Sr. Kathryn made her Final Vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience to our Bishop Visitor, Archbishop Linda Nicholls. The service which Sr. Kathryn planned was both very contemplative and joyous. The Eucharistic Prayer came from *Women Included: A Book of Services and*

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Prayers by the St. Hilda Community and had a distinctive feminist slant. We have a close connection with the Order of the Holy Paraclete and many of our sisters have visited the Priory of St. Hilda in Whitby, England, with whom we have an exchange arrangement. On this occasion, we were delighted to be able to invite members of the Community of the Sisters of the Church and the Order of the Holy Cross to celebrate with us, something we hadn't been able to do for almost two years.

You may remember that back in May we had a different kind of "plague" in the Sisterhood in the form of scabies which was picked up in Emergency at one of our local hospitals. Sr. Jocelyn had the worst case but several others caught it. On the May long weekend, the whole community went through a massive cleansing of ourselves and of the convent, especially in the bedroom area. We thought we had dealt with it... but we hadn't. So we had to go through a second "cleansing" on December 27th. Instead of covering ourselves with special cream, we all had to take special pills, which Sr. Brenda wrapped for each of us individually and put on our Christmas tree. It's certainly the most unusual Christmas gift I've ever received. A few of the sisters are still experiencing the itching caused by scabies but it is gradually getting less and less.

In January we celebrated Fr. Freeland's 97th Birthday with a pizza dinner which he has grown to enjoy after living with us for several years. This was followed by his favourite cake "opera" from "Aux Delices" bakery in Toronto. The next day we discovered that Sr. Suzanne Marie had Covid-19, the dreaded Omicron variant, and we had all been together enjoying a delicious meal and conversation. When Sr. Brenda informed me of the situation I was sure that most of us would come down with the virus as happened in one of the religious communities in the U.S. After consulting a specialist at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, Sr. Brenda told me we all had to go into isolation in our bedrooms for five full days. As no one was going to bring all of us our meals in our bedrooms, we had to decide what isolation could reasonably mean for us.

Whenever we left our bedrooms, we had to wear

N-95 masks. Many of us have private offices but we had to find individual "spaces" for those that normally share space so that we could still use our computers and pray the Divine Office together using Zoom. For our meals we picked up our food in the refectory and took it back to our offices or bedrooms to eat. After supper three sisters washed all the dishes, put the food away and cleaned the refectory keeping a safe distance from each other. There were many more details to decide but the amazing thing is that not one of us got Covid except Sr. Suzanne Marie! What helped was that as soon as Sr. Suzanne Marie felt unwell, she went to the Guest House to isolate herself according to our protocols. It was an interesting time for us all.

In the last *Eagle* I shared the news that Sr. Dorothy Grace was on a six-month leave of absence to discern her future. She officially left the Community on February 9, 2022. We were very sad to say good-bye.

Sr. Suzanne Marie has been trying to get Permanent Residency status for some time, but it's much more difficult now for an American citizen to get Permanent Residency status if she is not doing a job that earns money. Sr. Suzanne Marie had to leave Canada by March 2nd because her present permit had run out. We are hoping to find a way to get her Permanent Residency status.

On March 9th we opened the Guest House again for individuals and small groups. Our numbers depend on how many we can safely seat in the chapel and in the refectory. We also hope to offer some "Food for the Soul" events in the fall.

May I wish you all a Blessed Holy Week and Easter.

Sister Elizabeth, SSJD
Reverend Mother

Volunteer Opportunities

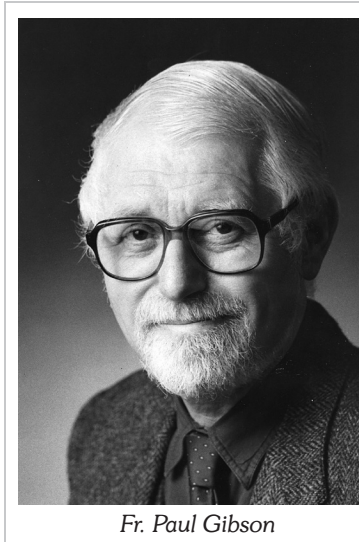
SSJD has reopened, and we need volunteers to staff our Reception Desk. If you can help us a day or a half day weekly or monthly, please contact Guesthouse@ssjd.ca. Other volunteer opportunities may also be available.

Easter Sermon at St. John's Convent by Fr. Paul Gibson

The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandments. But on the first day of the week, at early dawn they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen. Remember how he told you while you were still in Galilee that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. (From Luke 23, 24.)

Of the four Gospel-writers, I think Luke is the clearest in stating the purpose and thrust of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus was baptized and the Spirit descended on him. After his ordeal in the wilderness he went back to his home country and there in the synagogue he read from the Isaiah scroll at the Sabbath liturgy. "The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me," he read, "to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." When he had given the scroll back to the attendant, he added "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

The prophecies of the Hebrew scriptures have often been treated as predictions of the future, almost fortune-telling, which miraculously came true. Actually, they are insights into the purposes of God as the power of salvation which became the agenda of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus did not automatically and mechanically make them come true. In the power of God's Spirit, Luke would say, he embraced them as his agenda and realized them in his actions. That is why it is so important for us to read extensively from the Jewish Bible at this Easter Vigil liturgy, and to hear the agenda that Jesus Christ assumed. We have heard the story of



Fr. Paul Gibson

creation and its goodness and we know that it is the purpose of Jesus to realize its goodness again.

We heard the story of the Exodus and we know that the ministry of Jesus includes the release of slaves. We heard the longing of exiles for their home, and we know that Jesus has good news

for the oppressed. The prophecies are fulfilled because Jesus took them on. Everything else that Luke has to say in his Gospel and even his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, is based on the agenda which Jesus read in the Nazareth synagogue.

Oh, it looked towards the end of Luke's first volume as though it was all coming to an end. It looked as if the agenda of Jesus led not to the reign of God but to the cemetery. But it was in the cemetery that the women, the first apostles of the resurrection, heard a voice proclaiming "He is not here." He is not here among the dead. His agenda not only continues, but also expands, to bring not only joy to his followers but also peace and justice to the world. That is why Luke wrote a second volume, to tell of the explosion of the agenda of Jesus through the Easter event. That is why his second volume has no proper ending but fizzles out, because we are still writing its ending. It is Easter and the message, "He is not here in the cemetery," gives his agenda to you and to me.

In the darkest of nights we light a fire, and from that fire we light a candle, and from that candle we illuminate the house, and in that light we read the story, and in the strength of that story we renew our commitment, and thus renewed we eat and drink for our journey, and so we go out with the agenda of Jesus. And there is no end to it. Amen.

From "Briefly Stated: Short Sermons for Year C," by Paul Gibson. Copyright 1994. Reprinted with permission. Photo: General Synod.



Guest House rendering – renovated entrance

Update on Guest House renovations

There is good news and bad news! Let's get the bad news out of the way first. The cost report that we received in early March, after our architects completed the schematic designs for the renovation, show that we would have to raise closer to \$5 million than \$2.5, which was the highest we had anticipated and what we had reported in the last *Eagle*.

But all is not lost. The good news is that we have signed a contract with M&M International, an Anglican-based fundraising company here in Toronto, to do a feasibility study for us to get some idea of whether we would be able to raise that amount of money with donations and pledges over a five-year period.

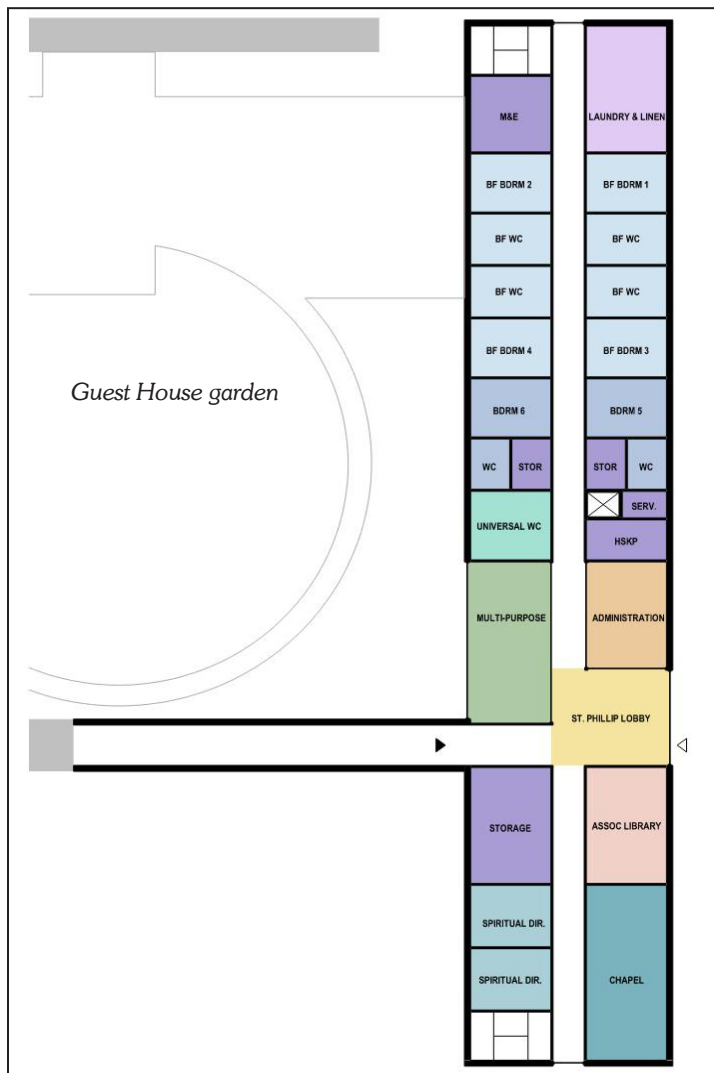
The feasibility study will include contacting Associates, Oblates, friends, and other potential donors who would be willing in some cases to participate in a group conversation and in other cases to share in an individual interview with one of the staff of M&M Consulting. They

will present our Case for Support (to be developed by M&M International), seeking support for our plans and advice about construction plans and other people and foundations who may be able to help us.

If the study (which will take about four months) is encouraging and the sisters decide to go ahead, we will be seeking a lead donation of 20% of the total amount to be raised (in this case about \$1 million) or two gifts of \$500,000, and then of course we will look for donors and other ways to raise the additional 80%.

Some more interesting news: When the sisters looked at the cost of renovations (which includes a large contingency because we have no idea what we will find once we start pulling walls apart – for instance, we suspect that there is asbestos around the plumbing pipes in the crawl spaces in the basement, but we won't

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Architects' drawings showing two aspects of the floor plan for level 1. Left, new building. Right, renovated building.

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know for sure the extent of work until construction workers actually dig in there).

We have done some preliminary calculations to see what the cost of building a completely new Guest House would be, and we might be able to do that for a little less than the renovated building – which is from the mid-1950s.

A new building could be an investment for the future, and it could have some beneficial features, including a more energy-efficient heating and cooling system and a fully insulated building (which double-brick construction from the 1950s does not have). The most significant difference, though, is that it is much easier to predict the cost of a new building than a renovation of an old building which has so many contingencies.

So, dear friends of the Sisterhood, we would deeply appreciate your prayers and your advice to us. The Case for Support will be included in the next *Eagle*, and we would be grateful for your feedback in the meantime about the various options we are exploring. We also hope that if you are asked to participate in a group or individual interview you will agree to help. You can volunteer to help as well – don't wait for us to call you – please be in touch at any time!

We continue to be deeply grateful to all those who have made possible the “new” Convent (which opened in January 2005), and now we hope it may be possible to have a Guest House which will assist us in our 137-year-old ministry of hospitality for many years in the future.

Sr. Constance Joanna, SSJD

Meet some of our Oblates

Barbara Sheppard



I was born in London, Ontario. From there, my father's work took the family to New York, Chicago and Saskatoon, then back to Chicago and Detroit during the turbulent 1960s. I was baptized but unchurched.

I did an MSW at U of T, was married for a time, and had two children. My son Jon now lives with his wife in Los Angeles. My daughter Ellen was severely disabled and lived with me until she was twenty-five. After I met Henri Nouwen in 1980, he brought me to faith and to friendship with the L'Arche community. Twenty years later, Ellen became a "core member" in a L'Arche home. Today I remain friends with that house and a "Supporting Member" of L'Arche Toronto.

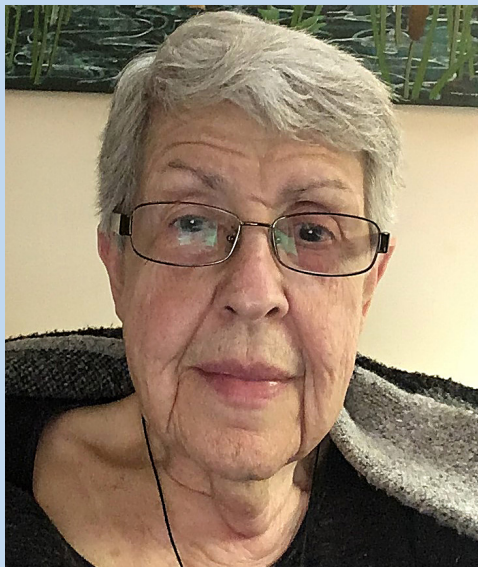
I trained as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist and worked for many years in a children's mental health centre. After Ellen moved into L'Arche, I began working at one of St. Michael's Hospital's community clinics, and the hospital funded my spirituality studies at Regis College. I then studied retreat direction as a nine-month Staff Associate at Loyola House in Guelph. Our little international internship community of six has remained connected over the miles and years.

March of 2013 brought a very dark time. Ellen became ill, and after much suffering, died in September. We'd been so close that I was truly surprised to find myself surviving her a year later. God then led me to the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine, with whom I gratefully lived as an Alongsider. The sisters were (and still are) so very kind, open and welcoming. Despite some health challenges, I received many blessings that year, which led to my becoming an Oblate. Today, my Oblate promises and times spent with the sisters and with other Oblates help spiritually sustain me.

I am grateful to volunteer with the Sisterhood as Spiritual Direction Coordinator, as well as leading the occasional retreat and managing their Silent Directed Retreats in the Guest House. At home, I continue offering ongoing spiritual direction. I also enjoy supporting people who live on the margins, painting ("writing") contemporary icons, exploring mysticism, and gardening with my apartment community.

God is good.

Gail Holland



I was born in Toronto and lived there most of my life. I grew up in the United Church of Canada, but during my teens, I discovered Anglo-Catholicism and fell in love with it. I rejoiced in being able to worship with my whole body and all my senses, and eventually was confirmed at St. Thomas' Anglican church, Huron Street in my mid 30s.

My paid employment was primarily as an administrator, and I ended my career working for General Synod, the head office of the Anglican Church of Canada, first for the Primate's Fund and later as coordinator of the Anglican Appeal.

I have been a volunteer for many years, primarily with the marginalized: the under-housed and homeless, private sponsorship of refugees, many of whom were from Rwanda and Burundi after the

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terrible genocide in 1994, and with ex-offenders who are trying to adjust to life in wider society after their release from prison.

Several years after I retired, I moved to Ajax, a bedroom community east of Toronto, where I share a home with my younger son and his family and have the joy of watching my grandchildren grow up.

I was an Associate of the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine for 29 years, a wonderful relationship that brought me closer to the sisters, especially when I started volunteering at the convent. In

2017, I made my initial promises as an Oblate.

My Rule of Life has grounded me in my faith, and particularly during this pandemic, has given me a framework for each day as I pray the Divine Hours at the same time as the sisters; it makes me feel connected when I can't be with them in person. It has also given me peace of mind and helped me to live in the present, one day at a time. I am getting accustomed to "zoom worship" and am now comfortable reading scripture and leading the Prayers of the People from a distance. Like many, I long for the time when we are all able to return to our churches in person and receive communion again.

Rev. Joanne Davies



I was born in Nottingham, England, and immigrated with my parents to Canada as a child. I have one brother who was born in Calgary. My family lived in Alberta until I was 15 years old. We moved regularly between Calgary and Edmonton, plus eight months in Toronto during 1963-64. I experienced moving from school to school as an adventure as I enjoyed new beginnings and making new friends.

In 1969 my family moved to southern Ontario and, except for two years in Edmonton, when I was first married, I have been there ever since. The rest of my high school years were spent in Georgetown District High School. The joyful energy of two evangelical Christian youth groups, voracious reading, and the love of Star Trek led me

happily past teenage angst. I returned to the Anglican Church in my twenties and began a journey to express the mystical and contemplative spirit of my (extroverted) being.

I went to the U of T to study English Literature for an Honours BA. Following graduation I was offered work at W.H. Smith Booksellers to become a book buyer and manager. Realizing I would be sharing my love of stories I accepted and appreciated every day that followed.

I live in Toronto, have two grown children, Kate, married to Spencer, and Garbhan who shares a home with me. Tully-the-Cat lives with me and Garbhan.

In 1998 a fulfilling, active life in the church called me to Trinity College for my M.Div. During my third year I worked most weekends as an on-call Chaplain in the downtown hospitals. Graduating in the spring of 2001, I began a residency of Clinical Pastoral Education at St. Michael's Hospital. At the close of that year I became a Diocesan Chaplain at Mount Sinai Hospital. I was ordained a priest in 2010 and continued my work as a chaplain.

In 2013 I became the Priest-Chaplain at St. John's Rehab. I am now the Spiritual Care Coordinator on behalf of the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine. In 2017 I made my initial promises as an Oblate and will make Life Promises shortly.

Correction

In the Advent 2021 Eagle we listed the Rt. Rev Eric Bays as having celebrated 55 years of being an Associate. In fact, it was the 55th anniversary of his wife, **Mrs. Patricia Bays**. We apologize for the error.

The Companions Program

September 2022 – July 2023

The residential Companions program is an immersive opportunity to experience a contemporary monastic community rooted in the Benedictine tradition. It is open to women aged 21 and up regardless of Christian denomination.

Companions live, work, and pray alongside the sisters, learning from them but also sharing each companion's own gifts with the sisters and their ministries. They will:

- Learn to cultivate peaceful and creative ways of living in a diverse intentional community
- Appreciate silence and solitude as well as community and service for a healthy life
- Put down deep roots of spiritual intimacy with God and each other
- Develop a personal path to ongoing spiritual growth
- Discern individual gifts and vocations.



Application start & end (both programs):
January 1, 2022 – May 15, 2022



Open to women of all Christian expressions, Companions Online is an opportunity to become "monastics in the world," living a Benedictine rhythm of prayer, work, study, and recreation. Online Companions learn to develop practices that support and nurture their spiritual life from the comfort of their homes.

They meet regularly for classes and discussion groups, and commit to times of personal prayer at home. They share in book studies, participate in online worship and screen films relevant to spiritual growth and self-understanding. Online Companions also develop spiritual disciplines that follow the liturgical year.

Cost:

Residential Companions: sugg. \$100.00/month.

Companions Online: sugg. \$50.00/month.

If cost is a hindrance, assistance is available.

To learn more about either program, or to apply, email Shannon Frank-Epp, Program Coordinator, at companions@ssjd.ca, or phone St. John's Convent: 416-226-2201, ext. 342

The Sisterhood of St. John the Divine

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