



# The Eagle

Summer 2023

**Dear Associates, Oblates and Friends,**



*Paschal candle*

Life almost seemed to return to normal during the last few months. A few people joined us for the Easter Retreat on the words and music of Handel's Messiah led by Sr. Anne. Once again we had the foot-washing on Maundy Thursday and Sr. Kathryn decorated the Paschal candle with Easter lilies for us.

Towards the end of April John Bell came to visit us. First he gave a workshop to the Sisters on "The Integrity in our Engagement with the Psalms" and the following week we offered a Food for the Soul Retreat on "The Engaged Spirituality of Jesus". Both were very well received by those who attended.



*Members at CAROA meeting in April 2023*

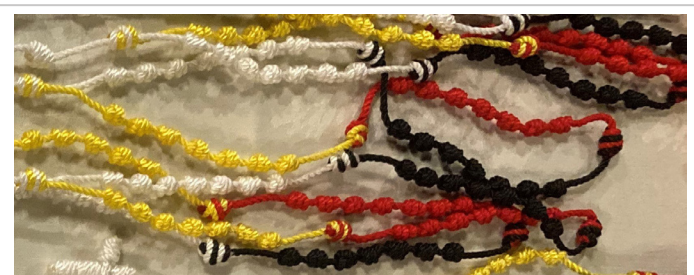
The last week of April, Sr. Elizabeth Ann and I attended the Conference on Anglican Religious Orders in the Americas (CAROA) at the monastery of the Order of the Holy Cross in West Park, New York. The last time we met in person was in 2019 so it was wonderful to come together this year.

On June 14<sup>th</sup>, the Feast of St. Barnabas transferred, Sr. Wendy Grace made her Life vows as a sister in our community. A Life Profession is always cause for celebration in the Sisterhood. We were delighted to welcome some of Wendy Grace's friends, Associates and Oblates on this special day. Those who couldn't join us could watch it livestreamed or later on our website.



*Abp. Linda Nicholls places the ring on Sr. Wendy Grace's finger*

The last week of June Sr. Elizabeth Ann and I went to General Synod which was being held at the University of Calgary. I was a delegate representing the Religious Communities in Canada along with Sr. Heather, CSC. Sr. Elizabeth Ann and Br. James Koester, SSJE, were also there to staff the CAROA booth where we had printed materials from each of our four communities.



*Rosaries in the four colours of Indigenous peoples*

Before leaving for General Synod, Elizabeth Ann had made over 35 Anglican rosaries in the four colours—black, red, yellow and white—of the

*Continued on page 2*

Indigenous people of North America, to give away. She asked whoever took one to make a donation either to SSJD or to the PWRDF for the Anglican Healing Fund. She also continued making rosaries while she was at the booth and sold them all.

Unfortunately we both got Covid after General Synod, so we couldn't visit all the people we were hoping to see in Vancouver, which was disappointing. While we were away, the Women at a Crossroads program began at the convent. Our last one was in 2018, so it was wonderful to be able to offer this free program once again. We had nine women here this year coming from Halifax, Montreal, Whitby, Bowmanville, Toronto, London, and Kalamazoo, Michigan.

The program offers many different classes on prayer including contemplative prayer, praying with rosaries, art, the labyrinth, etc. The women also did some work in the convent each afternoon to help the sisterhood, e.g. cleaning fans, gardening, dusting bookshelves, and visiting sisters on the first floor.

In the middle of the Women at a Crossroads Program, we had our annual Associate Barbeque at the convent, another sign of life returning to a more normal schedule. There were over 30 Associates and Oblates present for this event. The weather was perfect—sunny and not too hot; the gardens were thriving; and the buzz of conversation was enjoyed by everyone as we caught up on each other's lives.



**Women at a Crossroads walk the labyrinth**

Our Companions Program (2022-2023) finished in June. We really enjoyed getting to know these eight women who had joined us online for weekly classes for the past ten months. We had classes, discussions, sharing, and monthly small-group prayer time. We are now preparing for the 2023-2024 Companions Program with six women online and one residential. They will all come to the convent in September for a long weekend to meet one another and the sisters, and to get a better feel for the program before moving to Zoom.



**Guests enjoy the Associate BBQ**

Our servery for hot foods in the refectory is now fully operational and working well. In May we made wearing masks optional. Two committees have been working hard: The Renovations Committee, which meets with the architects on a regular basis, and the Capital Campaign Committee, which has been working together for several months to plan each stage of the Campaign and to make visits to prospective major donors. We are extremely fortunate in the dedication of the committee members.

I hope each of you has found time to relax this summer. Blessings,

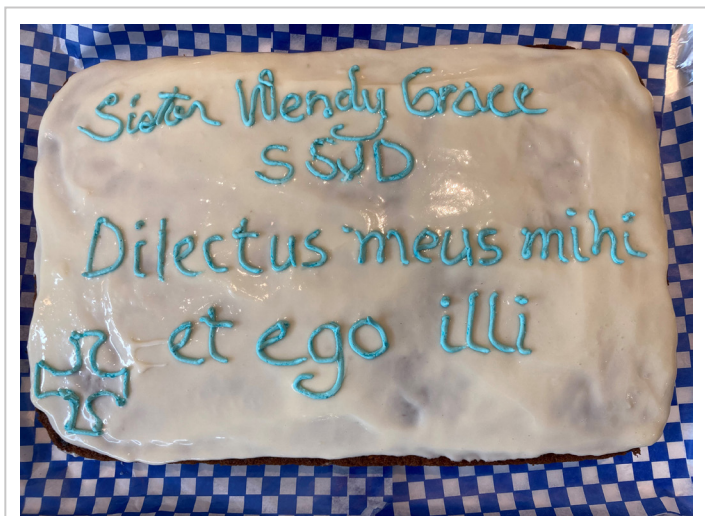
**Sr. Elizabeth Rolfe-Thomas, SSJD**  
**Reverend Mother**



## Taking my place in Community

In the time between my election to Life Profession and my actual Life Profession – a period of a few months – occasionally one of my sisters would pray for me during the intercessions at the daily Eucharist. I would hear a Sister say, ‘as she prepares to be life-professed’ and I would have a moment of split-second panic when I thought, ‘Am I supposed to be doing something?’ Then I would remind myself that I was making all the necessary external preparations, the guest list, the service participants, the menu and the music. Most of all the music. For me the music was the one area of my life profession where I felt freest to express myself.

All the music I eventually chose for my Life Profession service expressed something of my thoughts and feelings about being life professed. The one exception was the first hymn, Fanny Crosby’s *To God Be the Glory*, which I chose to honour my mother who couldn’t be present but who would be watching online at home.



**Sr. Wendy Grace’s cake with ‘Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi’ (My beloved is mine and I am his), the inscription inside ring given at Life Profession**

Through all the fussing with the guest list and the seating plan and the weighty decision of what kind of cake I wanted (in the end I chose carrot cake) a verse from one of the hymns, *God of All Time, All Seasons of Our Living* kept running through my mind. “Here in this place, where others have been building, we come to claim the legacy of faith; take, in our turn, the telling of your story; and though we tremble, speak your hope, your truth.”

June 14<sup>th</sup> drew closer and closer and this hymn kept me constantly aware that as a life professed sister I would be taking my turn in the telling of the story and that I was in the company of those, both past and present, who have created, built, shaped, sustained, loved and prayed for our community.

As I reflected on this sense of standing at a threshold, looking to the future and the past, I thought about our linear experience of time. I went from postulant to novice to first professed to life professed in the community. I didn’t skip any steps or go back and repeat a step – I went from A to B to C. That kind of linear progression satisfies my need for certainty. But I know God is calling me to trust more, to let go of my need for certainty. My original decision to test my vocation was an expression of trust in the One who was calling me beyond where I felt safe.

As I was thinking about these things I considered the symbols of our community life and how a Life Profession is marked by the community. I’m the 173<sup>rd</sup> woman to be life professed in the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine. Since our founding in 1884 there have been 172 other Life Professions. No matter what happens to me, in the history of the community I will always be number 173.

But the symbols of community life, received over the last six years – the constitution binder, the community cross, the girdle with its three knots symbolizing the three vows, the gold band received at Life Profession – are all for my current use but, after I die, they will be used by somebody else. And this circularity, this repeating cycle, gets at a truth about time. My time in community can be reduced to a straight line, but in reality the richer experience has been more like a spiral: movement forward but also seemingly turning back on oneself. It is in the spaciousness of the spiral that we make room for the “God of all time” to work in our lives.

**Sr. Wendy Grace, SSJD**

## Musings on the Feast of Saint Mary the Virgin, August 15

This is the feast day that commemorates Mary at the end of her earthly life: as the collect indicates (BAS p. 419) ... “O God, you have taken to yourself the blessed Virgin Mary, mother of your incarnate Son. ...” For me this is a feast day where we have an opportunity to ponder Mary, now an old woman, in the spirituality of the second half of life.

There is very little known about Mary and a great deal that has been said about her; however there remains a hiddenness and a solitude about her. She is a woman of the heart, who throughout her life treasured and pondered things in her heart.

In his book “A Woman Wrapped in Silence” – J. Lynch writes:

*And peace that made its quietness in her was  
peace  
God gave, since she had made a place for it by  
tired hands and a heart that did not tire.  
...A woman wrapped in silence, and the seed of  
silence,  
Was her heart that tried to give all that it held to  
give, and ever more.  
...And still was here a woman  
Wrapped in silence, and the words were closed  
Within her spacious heart for pondering.*

Mary – a woman of the heart, of silence and prayer, called and chosen, a woman of ‘fiat’ and ‘Magnificat’, God-bearer to the world – someone we can talk of being like – for she mirrors in us the image and likeness of God that God so wills to be found in us all. Someone called and chosen, someone of the heart, of silence and prayer, someone who lived in partnership with God, someone who lived discipleship. Someone of Fiat (yes) and Magnificat (bold discipleship thanksgiving).

A Fiat response to life – a yes to all of life, is also a mystery and is calling out for her and for us all the time. Mary’s fiat, I believe was something that she was challenged to repeat throughout her life, over and over again daily.

A Magnificat response to life – a gratitude response to every aspect of life and death, an active choosing of life-giving justice and mercy for everyone – is also a mystery, to be repeated over and over again throughout life.

Her first fiat at the Annunciation and her first Magnificat at the Visitation to Elizabeth: Mary’s yes and perplexity at the Annunciation and the Visitation stayed with her I believe throughout her life. Mary continued to be puzzled whenever she was confronted by signs and hints of who Jesus was and what he was meant to do. But she was always patient in her puzzlement: “Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart”.

What about her fiat and her Magnificat at the time when Joseph died? He too is someone wrapped in silence; very little is known about Joseph. This is an opportunity to ponder Mary in the midst of loss and grief when Joseph died. The loss of a loving companion and partnership, of someone who had protected and loved and always been there – a man open to God whose own fiat throughout his life nurtured the safety and love and trust that created a real home for both Mary and Jesus.

Joseph gentle and strong. Joseph compassionate and obedient. Joseph of great spirit and great faith. Joseph who listened to the word and who listened in silence. He is gone, probably sometime during Jesus’ ministry, but certainly before the Crucifixion when the disciple John takes Mary home with him.

Within the mystery of Mary’s fiat and Mary’s Magnificat at this time, at the loss of beloved Joseph, there is a time for her to weep. Mary’s lament at Joseph’s death, her fiat and her



**St. John leads St. Mary to his home after the crucifixion. Stained glass in the Lady Chapel at St. John’s Convent, Cummer Avenue**

Magnificat giving voice to her grief and her sorrow, her anxieties. It is important to remember prayers and songs of lament need to be part of life, there is value in the prayers and songs of lament. They shape our relationship with God. The writings of the prophets and the psalms are filled with laments.

What about her fiat and her Magnificat at the time of her Son's cruel death on the Cross – when a mother has to be there and to watch while her child dies a cruel death. The shock and the sadness, the confusion and anger, the tiredness, more tired than one could ever have thought possible from the trauma of it all. These are some of the experiences people go through when they have to watch their own child die. I am sure that it was so with Mary also. Within the mystery of Mary's fiat and Mary's Magnificat at this time, when her child dies, there is a time to weep. Mary's fiat and Magnificat at this time, the death of Jesus, her son, giving voice to her grief and her sorrow.

Joan Chittister writes: "Of all the expressions of human emotion in the lexicon of life, weeping may be the most functional, the most deeply versatile. The tears we weep show us our deepest, neediest, most private selves ... what we cry about is what we care about ... tears give life to the grief of endings, give them dignity and give them honour. What was, was good. What is to come is mystery. Once the tears have been shed that mark the loss then the changes can be made that mark the new beginning ... Every little death we die turns us into something new and washes us up on the sunlit shore of a different psyche, a person called by an old name but unknown even to ourselves."

Mary, this woman wrapped in silence ... the ache of silence that was her heart that tried to give all that it had to give, and ever more. She followed her son from Galilee to Jerusalem, stood with the others who witnessed his crucifixion, shared in the disciples' community of prayer and watched with them for the coming of the Holy Spirit. This woman was a strong woman, perplexed but patient, willing to meet all of life and hope through it all. Someone whose heart has been

broken, whose life is vulnerable, whose love is all encompassing. People will come to that kind of person for help, people will confide in that kind of a person. This is how I see Mary in old age – an *anawim* (someone who has remained faithful to God throughout all that life brings) – and – an *anam cara* (a soul friend) a blessing to all those around her.

One of the comments that Richard Rohr made in his book "*Falling Upward*" that has stayed with me, and has often been part of my pondering Mary's life is the following quote: "Most of us tend to think of the second half of life as largely about getting old, dealing with health issues, and letting go of our physical life, but the whole thesis of this book is exactly the opposite. What looks like falling can largely be experienced as falling upward and onward, into a broader and deeper world, where the soul has found its fulness, is finally connected to the whole, and lives inside the Big Picture."

With Mary, her coming to human fullness was through many different life experiences, difficult experiences – in fact against all odds and personal suffering as well as those good blessings that friends and family bring. So too is this gift held out to us individually and as a community.

T.S. Eliot in his poem "East Cocker" wrote:

*Old men ought to be explorers  
Here and there does not matter  
We must be still and still moving  
Into another intensity for another union, a deeper  
communion.*

The second half of life is a journey and the goal of coming back home. Today we celebrate Mary's heavenly birthday – the joy of seeing God her beloved, face to face, even as we look forward to our own.

**Sr. Doreen, SSJD**



## One stitch at a time

Needlework, especially embroidery, was one of the community's first artistic offerings to the Church. Mother Hannah, our foundress, was an expert needlewoman, and this gift was passed on to other sisters who joined her in liturgical embroidery. Churches in Toronto and across Canada have vestments and altar frontals made by our sisters, especially Sr. Joanna, who stopped doing coloured needlework in 1976 because her sight was failing.

When I entered the convent in 1994 I heard about Sr. Joanna and saw her work. It was exquisite. I had learned a bit about needlework through Lewiscraft embroidery kits; Sr. Joanna's handiwork was professional, not like my very amateur efforts. When sisters realized my passion for needlework they gave me kits they had received as gifts and were not interested in making. So I began to branch out and learn about different kinds of stitches.

Initially I worked with cotton thread, but as time went on this hobby became more serious and I started using silk threads with some gold trimming. A sister gifted me with a quilt kit which features 12 blocks with a rose pattern for embroidering. I've now finished six of the 12 blocks, and am working on the seventh.

For several years I met with the women of the Ecclesiastical Needlework Committee of the Anglican Church Women of the Diocese of Toronto every other week and learned more and more about needlework.

My other source of inspiration and encouragement was our late Associate Dee Ford who had actually worked with Sr. Joanna in the embroidery room at the Botham Road Convent. Dee took me under her wing and even brought me some of the patterns that Sr. Joanna had given her much earlier. She also gifted us with cotton threads of many colours.

When I became sacristan at the convent, I realized that we needed to preserve and restore the vestments that we still have and treasure as a part of our SSJD heritage. With two members

of the Needlework Committee I participated in an ecclesiastical embroidery workshop on the restoration of vestments at the Community of St. John the Baptist in Mendham, New Jersey. While there I took some instructions in shading and have been putting this to use on the squares for the quilt.

I have been practising my needlework skills on the rose pattern to gain more confidence in doing work for the chapel. When the chapel acquired an ambo (reading desk) that called for an antependium (pulpit fall or hanging) I was pleased. This created an opportunity for me to do a small work to enhance the colour in the chapel.

The first antependium I created was of a Celtic cross which is displayed when we celebrate the feasts of Celtic saints. I had an opportunity to visit and stay at Iona Abbey and the colours I chose reflected those I saw at Iona. I went on to do an eagle design for the feasts of St. John, one for Advent which features the symbols of the Great Os, and a Lenten antependium which is a design by Sr. Joanna of the passion flower.



During the pandemic the Royal School of Needlework in the U.K. began offering courses online. I took one in crewel work, another in silk shading, and am currently taking a course on goldwork. Last year I completed a design, also from Sr. Joanna, of a dove descending (see above) in time for the Feast of Pentecost using red silk fabric together with silk thread and gold trimming. We also display this on Thursdays when we commemorate the unity of Christians, and during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Do look at our antependiums when next you are in our chapel.

**Sr. Anne, SSJD**

### Attention Associates

If you have changed your email address or acquired one in the past year, please advise us of this at [associates@ssjd.ca](mailto:associates@ssjd.ca)

## A HOME FOR THE HEART

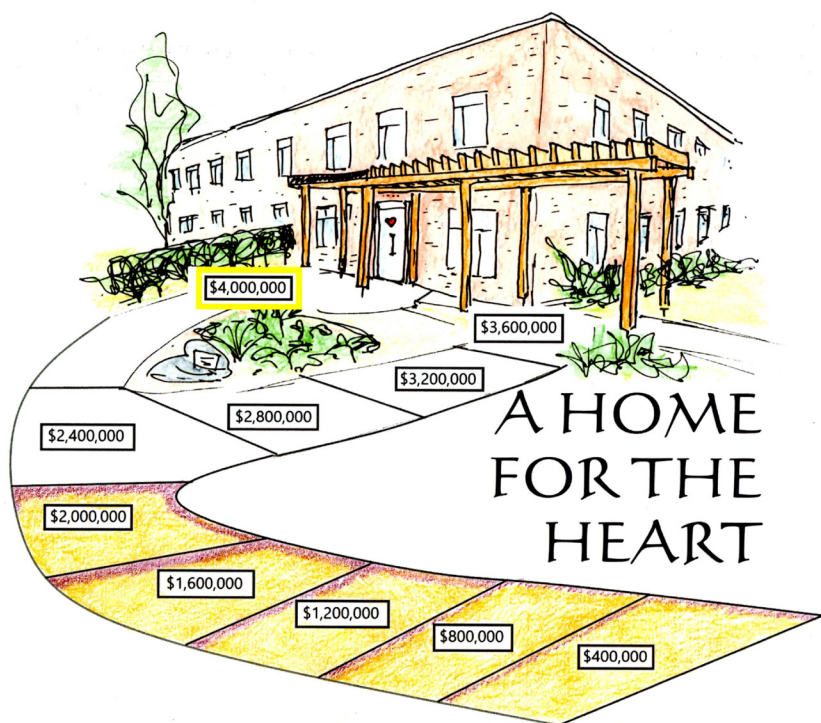
### *Capital Campaign for the Renewal of SSJD's Beloved Guest House*

We are excited to bring you an update on how our **“Home for the Heart” Capital Campaign** has been progressing.

**Updated Project Cost Estimates:** As you can imagine, a project of this magnitude requires juggling and nudging forward of so many interconnected and moving parts. We also need to be creative, flexible, and trusting in handling curve balls and new information!

The Guest House renovation needs and specifications were developed, shaped, refined, and clarified through an extensive process. When final estimates were completed, the total, all-inclusive project budget turned out to be significantly higher than first thought or hoped: \$6 million. After careful and prayerful examination, the Sisterhood agreed that the priorities of essential and over-due repairs, increased physical accessibility and safety, and improved functionality, could not be compromised. The Guest House must be renewed so that the Sisterhood can continue to provide hospitality and welcome for generations to come. As a result, the Sisterhood unanimously agreed to increase our contribution to this project to \$2 million. This is definitely a stepping out in faith, as we depend on revenue from the Founders' Fund to help fund operating expenses. However, we trust that God will provide and others will also be encouraged to step out in faith and close the gap for the additional \$4 million needed for this project.

**Fundraising Progress to Date:** Throughout the early spring, we had the joy of connecting with so many, to share the invitation to join us in contributing to the Guest House renewal. We met with you through Zoom information sessions, in-person tours, presentations to parish and diocesan gatherings, and one-on-one conversations and visits. We are grateful for God's blessing through your generosity. As of July 18<sup>th</sup>, we have received \$1.9 million in pledges and donations towards the \$4 million to be fundraised for this project. **Thank you!**



*As of July 18th we are almost half-way there – nearly \$2 million pledged and donated of our \$4 million fundraising goal. Shaded flagstones indicate donations to date.*

### **Busy and Joy-filled Summer at SSJD:**

Early summer has been a wonderful and active time, here. We have been delighted to welcome the first “Women at a Crossroads” residential program held since 2018. Nine participants have been journeying together under the guidance and mentoring of SSJD leadership. We have also hosted Quiet Garden Days, guests and groups on retreats, and many other visitors. We are so blessed to be able again to welcome guests into our home, providing space and guidance as they continue their faith journey and deepen their relationship with God, after the difficult challenges that COVID imposed on all of us. Thanks be to God!

**Looking Ahead:** After a brief summer recess, our expanded Capital Campaign Committee will return with fresh energy. Plans for the late summer and early autumn include:

*(continued next page)*

- Finalizing construction drawings which are currently in progress, in preparation for construction tendering;
- Receipt of construction permits;
- Continued applications for foundation and government grants; and
- Launch of the broader, “public” phase of our fundraising campaign.

**How You Can Help:** Please consider supporting this important campaign! There are lots of ways you can help:

- Pray for the “Home for the Heart” campaign and its dedicated committee. Pray that we may renew and equip the Guest House to welcome guests for generations to come.
- Pledge and donate to the campaign.
- Invite your friends and family to join you in supporting the Sisterhood.
- Include the Sisterhood in your will when estate planning.

**Thank You to Our Dedicated Capital Campaign Committee:**

Sr. Constance Joanna, SSJD, Co-Chair  
 Archbishop Fred Hiltz, Co-Chair  
 Archbishop Colin Johnson  
 Dean Peter Wall  
 Rev. Marilyn Newport (Dartmouth, NS)  
 Associate Rev. Dr. Connie Phillipson (Mulmur, ON)  
 Associate Marilyn Box (Ottawa, ON)  
 Oblate Sandi Patterson (Victoria, BC)

*... and welcome to our newest Committee members:*

Oblate Chris Hooker (Detroit, MI)  
 Associate Rev. Catherine Barley (Midland, ON)

**Katherine Corbett, Director of Operations**

## **The Sisterhood of St. John the Divine**

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